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"SEE DAR!" SHE CRIED, POINTING TO HER SCAR; "DAT SHOW YOU WHAT KIND OB MAN MASSA BE!"

Long Shot;

OR,

THE DWARF GUIDE.

BY CAPTAIN COMSTOCK.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRAIRIE COMBAT.

A YOUNG girl of seventeen was wending her way toward a small stream—one of the tributaries of the Osage River, in the southwest part of Missouri. It was morning, and the golden rays of the sun, streaming down through the branches of the laurel and the oak, fell upon the bright head of the girl, seeming to encircle it with a halo of glory. Such compliment from the sun was well deserved, the subject of it being surpassingly beautiful. Her looks were of that healthy type natural to the daughters of the South and West; yet there was not a particle of grossness in her appearance. About the average height, her form, while round and full, was as lithe and graceful as the swaying willow, her step as elastic as that of the bounding deer. Her rich black hair, combed back from her brow, fell in long, undulating masses to her waist; her eyes were of a deep, dark blue, her features all perfect, yet full of expression; her cheeks round, smooth, and glowing with the rich tint of health.

Her costume was becoming. She wore upon her head a small, round hat of deerskin, graced by an oriole's feather; a cloak of the same material, but of a soft dun color, drooped gracefully from the shoulders, half-hiding the black merino dress, trimmed with red.

This costume, half-civilized, half-Indian, was due to her having passed a great portion of her time in the little town of Batesville, at the residence of an intelligent aunt, who had taught her to cut and make her own dresses. She had also received, at the hands of this kind relative, an education better than that of most Western girls at the period we speak of. She could read and write well, had a good knowledge of French, and was not unskilled in embroidery.

Her aunt having recently died, her father—an old trapper and celebrated Indian-fighter, named Benjamin Ward, but known among red-men as "Lynx-eye"—came to take his daughter to the rude forest-home he inhabited about five miles from Batesville.

The young girl was glad to go, for she had always loved her father dearly, and had been in the habit of visiting him at times, and even accompanying him on his long tramps. A true hunter's daughter, she could handle the rifle when occasion required, or with skilled hand impel the light canoe along the rapid stream.

An uncle, named Wilkins, brother of the girl's deceased mother, and residing at Batesville, had wanted her to live with him, but Ward had refused because he disliked the man, who had the reputation of cheating or swindling poor trappers, while acting for them in the capacity of agent. In fact, Mary Ward herself, although her uncle was well off, preferred her father's

rude cabin to the comfortable abode of the agent, whose small, ferret-like eyes, low forehead, straight, sleek black hair and sneaking voice always inspired her with feelings of aversion.

On the morning we write of, Mary carried in her hand a stone pitcher, which she intended to fill with pure water from a spring about thirty yards from her father's door. On the right of the stream there was a dense forest, extending as far as the eye could reach; in front, far away, with its long, waving grass sparkling with dew as with an illimitable sprinkling of diamonds, with tall red and blue flowers gleaming through the green, was an expanse of prairie-land, apparently unbroken until it encountered a long range of rugged hills, whose summits were veiled in blue mist. Thoughtfully gazing toward the hills, Mary had nearly reached the stream, when from the brushwood skirting the bank, rose the dark face of a tall man, whose high cheek-bones and piercing eyes betokened Indian blood.

"Mary!" exclaimed the young man, advancing, "beautiful Star of the West, I am glad to see you!"

"The pleasure is all on one side," frankly answered the girl.

"You are cruel."

"Then you had better go to some one who will treat you better."

"I can not. Your beauty draws me like a spell."

"Mark Wyld!" cried the girl, impatiently, "your compliments are distasteful to me. Please stand aside, and let me fill my pitcher."

The flashing eyes, the cheek glowing redder than before, rendered Mary doubly attractive in her persecutor's eyes.

"No. I will not go until you give a decided answer to my request. Mary," he continued, "I love you, and would make you the wife of a man who can render you comfortable and happy. Do not say no, and seal my misery for life!"

"I have no love to give you," coolly answered Mary. "That is my answer."

The swarthy face almost turned black. Its owner's form seemed fairly to grow taller with mingled wrath and determination.

"Listen, then! As true as this sky is blue above us, you shall yet be my wife!"

"That will never be."

"We shall see," he answered, with a peculiar smile. Then he turned, and, hurrying to a copse-wood, not far distant, led forth his horse, and flung himself into the saddle.

Just then a dull report saluted the ears of the man and the girl, who, turning in the direction of the noise, out upon the prairie, beheld a spectacle, which at once riveted her attention.

Four dark forms, clearly revealed against the blue background of the sky beyond, were engaged in what seemed a mortal combat. All were mounted—two Indians, the others whites, as was indicated by their costume, although they were too far off for their faces to be distinguished. Although nearly a mile distant, every movement of the parties could be seen in the clear morning atmosphere. The one a tall, stalwart man, wearing a buffalo-cap, hunting-shirt and leather leggins had already shot one of his antag-

onists, who was seen limping along to secure his horse, which had halted not far distant when its rider was dismounted by a severe but evidently not a mortal wound.

"Quick!" exclaimed Mary, excitedly, "to the assistance of the whites! See! one of them is a mere pigmy. It is as if there were two against one!"

Mark bowed almost to the saddle, and smiling sarcastically, spurred toward the scene of combat, while Mary hastened toward the cabin to notify her father.

He was in the door—a tall, heavily-framed, red-haired man in the usual trapper costume—cleaning his rifle, when she flew toward him with the news.

"A fight on the prairie, eh?" he coolly remarked, and the next moment was upon the back of a trusty brown steed, taken from a shed behind the cabin. "You had better remain here," said the trapper, noticing the girl's wistful eye turned upon her own noble mare, which was also in the shed.

"Oh, no, papa, I *must* go with you! I cannot rest here, while you are away fighting!"

So saying, she mounted the mare, and was soon galloping like the wind behind her father, her long hair streaming.

Meanwhile Mark Wylde, by this time within hailing distance of the combatants, had, to the surprise of Mary and her father, reined in his steed, and sat, a *neutral*, watching the combatants without attempting to help the two whites, who, it was plain, must be eventually conquered by the savages. He who was wounded had remounted his horse, and the three now were making every effort to capture the others, dead or alive. The taller white man, however, was as expert at horsemanship as the Indians, and still, as he had hitherto done, contrived to outmaneuver them, so as to avoid their spears, which were hurled with great rapidity.

The other—a mere dwarf—kept by the side of his taller companion; a long knife—he seemed deprived of every other weapon—held firmly in his right hand.

"At them, Mark! What yer doin' thar so still? Why don't yer pitch into 'em?" roared the trapper, in voice of thunder, as he came dashing on, his ready rifle in his grasp, the horse's reins, untouched, hanging loosely.

Nearer and nearer the Indians closed every moment, upon their two antagonists. The taller, however, had now reloaded his rifle, and the muzzle was pointed at one of his foes.

The crack of the piece followed; but the wily Indian, at the moment when the trigger was pulled, had thrown himself far over the side of his horse, with his head almost under the animal's belly, and his lithe, limber legs, half lifted from the saddle, still clasping it like the folds of a snake. The white man's bullet passed between the right leg and the saddle just grazing the latter, when up rose the Indian to his natural position, his wild whoop ringing to the skies, and the three red-men now dashed toward the central figures with tomahawks upraised.

"Ah! God help them!" screamed Mary; then, turning white as a sheet—"father! father! the taller man is LONG-SHOT!"

Who was Long-shot?

A young trapper and hunter, thus named for his unerring aim at long distances, with his rifle. Quick as lightning on steed or on foot, tall, brave and handsome, with flashing eye, herculean shoulders, and voice as deep and rich as the prairie wind, no wonder that Mary loved the young hunter, who sometimes visited her, and would have visited her oftener, but for the dislike of her father, prejudiced against him for his close resemblance to his parent, an Englishman, now deceased, who, years before, had outrivaled him in the affections of a half-breed Indian girl of surpassing beauty. The girl became the Englishman's wife, to die a few years later, when the widower married again, this time a white woman, who also died—yielded up her life in giving birth to another—Kit Swift, or "Long-shot," as called by the red-men.

"I believe you're right, child, and hyar's a man to help the lad, while hatin' the sight of him!"

A piercing scream now rung from Mary's lips; Kit and the foremost Indian were fighting at close quarters—knife and hatchet, while the other two Indians were coming up behind.

Lynx-eye raised his rifle to his shoulder, took good aim and fired, when away went the horse of one of the savages, wounded and unmanageable, its baffled rider whooping out his disappointment.

"Mark, thar's a chance for yer. Down with t'other red-skin!"

But Mark neither moved nor responded by word, sign or look.

Mary, reading his reason at once, gave him a mingled glance of anger and contempt, as she flew past the wretch, who was not noble enough to help a rival.

Not until then did Mark urge his horse forward.

Meanwhile, the pigmy companion of Long-shot sat upon his steed, his knife tightly grasped, seemingly determined to keep at bay the Indians coming up in the rear of Kit. Seated thus, his person and face were fully revealed to those approaching, who deemed him the most singular object they had ever seen. His height could not have been greater than five feet three inches; his head was large, and strangely disproportioned to his body; his hair, coarse as the mane of a horse, projected on all sides, like the quills of a porcupine, from beneath its scanty covering—a little round canvas cap, with a raccoon-tail attached, not much larger than a tin cup. His forehead was low, broad, and wrinkled like that of a monkey; his skin of a bright-red color, especially about the nose, which was remarkably large, and curved something like a trumpet. His garb, too, was a strange one for the prairie, consisting of canvas jacket, pants and shoes, fitting him closely, and revealing strange protuberances about the limbs, like the knots one sees upon the oak and other trees.

The Indians were flying straight toward him, their eyes gleaming like coals of fire, their tomahawks already circling about their heads, when Lynx-eye, who had reloaded his rifle, took good aim at the foremost, who, noticing him, at once dropped down under his horse's belly, as his companion had done before him.

Crash! went the piece, when a stream of

blood trickling down the man's right leg, proclaimed the result of the shot.

Ward was now within about fifty yards of the Indians, with Mark closely following, when, perceiving that they were about to be outnumbered the Indians turned their horses' heads, and galloped swift as the wind, away from the spot. The one with whom Long-shot had fought bore several ghastly cuts about his person as mementoes of the close fight, while Kit was badly gashed about the shoulder.

As Ward rode up, followed by his daughter and Mark, the young trapper took off his cap, and seeming to take no notice of his wound, bowed low to the girl.

"Kit, oh Kit! you are badly hurt!" she cried, her plaintive voice at once revealing the secret which Mark Wylde had previously guessed. He clinched his teeth, and grasped, with a convulsive clutch, the hilt of his knife.

"A mere scratch," responded Kit, in clear, well-accented English, for he was intelligent and a good reader.

"Such a scratch as I wouldn't care to have on me," said Ward, bluntly. "Come to my cabin and let me see to it."

"There," said the young man, turning to the dwarf, "these are the people your letter is addressed to."

Then he briefly explained, that while riding over the prairie, toward Batesville, he had seen this dwarf pursued by the Indians, and had dashed on to his assistance.

"What's yer name—whar do yer hail from, and whar's the letter?" inquired Ward.

He had expected to hear the dwarf answer in a small, squeaking voice corresponding with his size; what, therefore, was his astonishment when the pigmy spoke in croaking tones like a bull-frog's.

"My name is Nick Gnarl. I come away from New Orleans. I bring good news!"

He drew himself up, folded his arms over his knotted chest, and eyed the company with an air of dignity rather comical in one of his size. Finally, noticing that the soft eyes of Mary were bent upon his face, he thrust a finger in his mouth, and turned his huge head sideways with an air of modesty.

"The letter! the letter! Whar's that?" cried Ward, rather impatiently.

From his pocket the dwarf then drew forth a letter, sealed and addressed to the trapper, who, glancing at the superscription, passed the missive to his daughter.

"I ain't good at readin' writin'," he remarked. "You better read it to me, Mary, when we get to the cabin."

At the cabin, all except Mark Wylde, who had ridden away, arrived in due time.

Mary, thinking of Kit before the letter, at once prepared a basin of water.

"Leave that to me," said Ward, a little impatiently, as the girl, with her own fair hands, was about bathing the injured shoulder. "Leave it to me and read the letter."

Mary obeyed reluctantly, when, requesting Nick to wash the wound, the trapper drew his daughter outside of the cabin. There she opened the letter and read the contents, which were from a cousin of Ward, written while the for-

mer lay upon a sick bed, and informing the trapper that certain houses and lands—a considerable property, worth about two hundred thousand dollars—were, by the invalid, who shortly expected to die, bequeathed to his only living relative, the trapper. The writer went on to state that the letter should be intrusted to the care of his steward, Nick, the dwarf, who had an excellent knowledge of the prairie, having passed the first few years of his life among a tribe of Indians to the west of Missouri, and who would act as guide to conduct Ward to his property. At this part of the letter the trapper smiled, for there was scarcely an inch of prairie-land between this point and New Orleans that he was not familiar with.

"Hyar's good news indeed," cried Ward, kissing his daughter; "you kin now occupy the persition I hev always wanted yer to. Houses and lands—pshaw! thar's good fortin, sure enough! Why, girl, what's the matter?"—for Mary had turned very pale, and was leaning, as if for support, against the cabin.

"A sick headache," she answered.

"It's queer for you to hev such a complaint," said the trapper, who had never known his healthy daughter thus affected before.

"It is the excitement," continued Mary, blushing, and then she sighed.

Ward was still more surprised, until he noticed his daughter's glance turned through a window upon Kit in the interior of the cabin.

A frown settled upon his brow. To make sure that his suspicion was correct, he continued:

"We must start as soon as possible for New Orleans."

The increased emotion of his daughter convinced him that the thought of leaving her lover was the cause of her agitation.

In this he was right.

The trapper hastily, almost rudely, left his child, and stalked into the cabin.

"Well," he said, somewhat gruffly, looking upon Kit, "how is your shoulder now?"

His manner annoyed the young man.

"I am ready to go," he said, rising quickly; "you do not want me here."

"Yes, yes; you are welcome to stay hyar. It isn't the begrudgin' of hospitality, but you know what it is."

And he glanced toward Mary, just entering.

"My attentions to your daughter are distasteful to you?"

"They are. Still, my daughter is free, in the matter of love, to do as she likes. One thing, however, is sart'in," and he brought his fist down upon the side of the cabin with great force, "ef she marries you, she and I must separate."

"Jist now that would be a pity," broke in Gnarl; "property like that what's left you ain't to be thrown away."

Ward eyed him sternly for his presumption, when the dwarf, planting one foot forward, cocking his canvas cap on one side, and folding his arms over his chest, stood *a la Napoleon*.

"I'm little," he said, "but oh! ho! no! I tell you! I have a right to speak!"

"Father! father, don't get angry," pleaded Mary, putting a hand upon his arm.

The trapper sat down. Kit arose.

"I do not wish to be the means of trouble between father and daughter. I go my way."

"Kit," exclaimed the young girl, running after him and seizing his arm, "you are not fit to go!"

"The last time we met," said Kit, in a low voice, "you would not give me a decided answer as to whether you loved me or not. Therefore, I am to infer that you do *not* love me, and if so, wherefore should I make trouble here?"

Mary turned pale, then, blushing deeply, she whispered, hurriedly:

"Oh, I do love you!"

"Then," said Kit, loud enough for Ward to hear him, "we shall meet again."

The trapper frowned. Kit bowed, and insisting that he would not remain beneath a roof where he was not wanted by the host, he gently disengaged himself from Mary, and, mounting his horse, rode off.

Mary watched him until she could no longer see him, then turned to her parent:

"Cruel father!"

She spoke so plaintively that Ward was touched. He drew his daughter to his side and kissed her.

"Decide for yourself," said he. "Marry Kit, if you like, and we part forever, or stay with me, and let him go his way."

Mary, however, would not answer him now. She hoped by her influence to soften him in time. Taking his hand in hers, she sat gazing dreamily through the swaying trees before the door, upon the blue sky, now full of golden light, thinking of Kit, when, suddenly, the voice of the trapper broke rudely upon her thoughts:

"We leave hyar, day arter to-morrow, fur New Orleans."

CHAPTER II. SCHEMING.

WHEN Mark Wylde left the party, on their way to the cabin, he rode toward Batesville.

Arrived near the town he met Roger Wilkins, Mary's uncle, with whom he was well acquainted.

In a few words he described the combat he had witnessed on the prairie, and mentioned the bearer of the letter to Ward.

"A letter?" said Wilkins, musingly.

"Yes."

"Good-day," and Wilkins rode away, determined to find out the contents of that letter by questioning the outspoken Ward.

Arriving at the cabin, he dismounted, to be welcomed by the trapper, who, out of respect to the memory of his wife, always gave the visitor a warm welcome.

Skillfully bringing round the subject of the letter, he soon learned what he wanted.

"It is a good property," he said: "accept my congratulations. The estate must be worth many thousands of dollars, the way property now sells in New Orleans! When do you set out?"

"Day arter to-morrow."

Soon after Wilkins departed.

Next day Mark Wylde received a letter from him, requesting a call upon business.

Mark repaired to Wilkins's house. The ager-

then procured a bottle of old wine, and filled the other's glass.

"Good wine," said Mark, smacking his lips.

"Yes. I have an inferior quality—more rum than wine—under my cellar."

"I understand," said Mark, half-laughing; "that's for the red-skins."

"Well, the truth is, those devils are very fond of fire-water, no matter what the quality, so long as it is *strong*. Ha! ha!"

"That's to your advantage. I understand, at least men say, that you have completely won the friendship of the Osages by your fire-water."

"Between you and me, that's true. They let me have skins cheaper than the trappers do."

"It must be profitable work," said Mark, his eyes lighting up.

"Profitable? Yes. By the way, I can put you in the same line of business; for, although you are well off, I doubt not that, like me, you are ready to add to your possessions?"

"Of course."

"Well, then, I will give the whole business up to you on one condition."

"What's that?"

Wilkins eyed the other intently, as if to make sure of his man, then said, "I think I can trust you."

"Certainly."

"Well, then, it seems that this Ward intends setting out, day after to-morrow, for New Orleans, to possess himself of some valuable property, left to him by a deceased cousin. This was the news in the letter."

Mark started; a frown settled on his brow. To lose Mary Ward were *now* to lose a golden prize!

"Now, then," continued Wilkins, "I know that you would like to have that girl for your wife."

Mark not denying this, the other went on:

"I would put her in your power. Go among the Osages, apprise them of the direction their great foe, Lynx-eye, intends to travel. They will lie in ambush for him. Let it be your task, therefore, to tell the chief of the tribe to spare the girl, but be *sure to slay the father*. There will be a chance to pretend to the girl that you have come among the Indians to save her. She will be grateful and will marry you."

"You are mis'aken," said Mark, gloomily. "She will never marry me!"

"She will if you manage rightly. Instruct the chief to tell her that, unless she accepts you, she shall become the wife of one of his red-skins."

Mark's eyes lighted up. Not at this remark, however, but at an idea it suggested to his mind.

"On one condition," continued Wilkins, "I will benefit you in this way, besides giving you the whole trade of the skins with the Indians."

"That condition?"

"Is that you do nothing regarding the New Orleans property, after you make Mary your wife."

"I will not consent. Give me a share—say one-third of the property—and I will be satisfied."

Wilkins opposed this argument a long time, but Mark remaining firm, he finally yielded.

"It is necessary that you set out at once."

"What preventive is there of *my* being slain by the Indians?"

"This," said Wilkins, pulling from his pocket a red plume feather. "I have stipulated with the Osage chief, O-wy-kee, that any friend of mine, showing this to him or his men, shall have a free journey through the tribe's country."

"Now, then, I have a question to ask."

"Well?"

"Why do not you, yourself, go to the tribe on this errand?"

Wilkins colored.

"Well, the truth is, I am a suspected man. The trappers and others have, in fact, spread a rumor that I am a traitor to the whites. Were I now to start for the Osage country, I have no doubt that there would be a bullet through my brain before I had proceeded ten miles."

"I will do what you wish, then, with the stipulation agreed upon," said Mark, rising.

"It is necessary that you set out at once, so as to get ahead of Ward."

"Very well, you may depend upon me."

A peculiar smile flitted over Mark's face, as, with the red feather thrust in his pocket, he quitted the house.

"He does not know me quite as well as I know *him*," the young man muttered.

Half an hour later he mounted his horse, and was dashing away toward the country of the Osages.

Next morning Ward began to make preparations for his departure.

Mary, with tears in her eyes, had already packed up her wardrobe and such provisions as she had prepared to last a portion of the journey. This Ward intended to perform entirely on horseback, an easy matter for one brought up almost from childhood, to rely upon steed and rifle. Before night they were ready to start. They gave a farewell glance at the little cabin and its familiar surroundings, then urged their horses forward.

Gnarl, the dwarf, accompanied them, striding his horse, and carrying himself with a dignity that was singularly out of place, as he looked like a mere wart alongside of gigantic Ward.

"A long, perilous journey is before us," said Mary, sighing, as she gazed far away toward the southwest, where the sky was flushed to amber and gold by the rays of the setting sun.

"You need not be afraid, young lady, while I am here to protect you," croaked Gnarl, in his peculiar, bull-frog voice.

"Ho! ho! ho! What kin *you* do?" laughed Ward, surveying the pigmy from head to foot.

"If there were Indians, you'd see," answered the dwarf. "One thing is certain: I'm remarkably supple."

So saying, he sprang straight up, standing on the horse's back, and urging the animal forward at its topmost speed. Away went the creature like a shot, disappearing in a thicket ahead. The next moment it came in sight again, with its rider standing upon his head.

"Yer kin beat me ridin'! that's a fact," said Ward, "an' now, ef yer kin beat me shootin', I'll own yer to be a better purtecter fur my darter than I be."

At this the dwarf, regaining his natural po-

sition, unslung from his back a rifle that Ward had given him, and taking aim at a small hawk on the top branch of a tree, fired.

Down came the creature, fluttering to the earth in a death struggle.

"Well done," said Ward; "but I kin beat ef I hit that branch."

With which he took aim at the twig upon which the bird had been seated, and firing, cut it in twain. The dwarf smiled, and shook his head.

"That's more than I could do. Still, if my rifle should fail me, I'd use this!" pulling his knife from his belt and with it making fierce lunge at the air.

His motions were so violent that, during a sort of backward lunge, he rolled over edge-ways from his seat; as he tumbled, however, catching the horse's tail, to which he clung, and by means of which he finally climbed back to his position.

"That'll do," said Ward. "I see you'll be good help to me in case of an attack."

They rode forward briskly, and by ten o'clock at night had gone over thirty-five miles of their journey. Blankets were then unrolled, and a tent pitched for Mary, who, when ready to retire, crept therein and laid down, with Ward and Gnarl outside. The dwarf had rolled himself into a ball, and was already fast asleep.

"I see this are a lazy cuss, and I kin stand the first watch," muttered the trapper.

He rose and walked slowly round the tent, now and then pausing to listen for any unusual sound.

At daylight, after breakfast, the party continued their journey.

In the afternoon, Ward, knowing he was near the country of the Osages, proceeded with more caution.

With eyes keenly bent upon the ground Ward was riding ahead, when he observed a horse's footprints, which were quite fresh. The turf being soft at this place, the impression was distinct, extending in a curved line away to the southwest.

The practiced trapper could at once distinguish the difference between the signs of the white rider and the Indian horseman. The latter, when meeting no obstruction, generally rides as he walks, straight forward, while the other's track is always more irregular, like the one which now came under Ward's observation.

He knit his brows, while an angry flash lighted his eyes.

Long-shot had probably heard of his meditated journey southward, he thought, and had ridden forward to intercept him.

In this he was mistaken; they were the tracks of Mark Wylde's horse that he saw, that personage having passed this way on the day before. Not many miles from this very spot, Mark had been intercepted by a warlike band of Osages, who suddenly burst upon him from behind a clump of shrubbery, dashing forward with the evident intention of making him prisoner.

Mark, taking from his pocket the red feather, showed the magic talisman to the Indians.

The moment they beheld this their demeanor

changed. They conducted the bearer with every mark of respect to their camp, situated about twenty miles further beyond.

The place it occupied was an extensive field, surrounded by a thick growth of trees and shrubbery, among which could be seen the gleam of blue, white and yellow flowers, which nodded softly in the breeze, sending forth a delicious fragrance.

The tents were all of circular form, the chief's being distinguished from the rest by its larger size and by its being in the center of the field. Soon the occupant of the central tent came striding forth, having heard of the new arrival.

He was a tall, powerful man, with a face hideously stained with red, blue and yellow ocher, and a bunch of red feathers protruding from each side of his head. These feathers, together with his garb—a buffalo-skin cloak, fancifully trimmed, and spotted deerskin breeches—gave him a singularly warlike appearance.

"What want? Wilkins sent the red feather. Come to trade for fire-water?"

As he put this question, the Indian's eyes glowed like hot coals, he smacked his lips, and fairly shivered all over with an involuntary thrill of joy.

Such emotion, not usually displayed by the red-man to the white, was an example of the powerful hold the liquor-demon had obtained over the sons of the forest and prairie.

"Yes, you can have plenty of fire-water, if you will do what Wilkins requires of you."

So saying, he explained, changing to suit purposes of his own, the plan of his employer.

The change consisted simply in this, that O-wy-kee was *not* to slay the father—the great Lynx-eye.

At this the Indian showed displeasure, which not even the prospect of fire-water could wholly subdue.

"Lynx-eye has killed many of O-wy-kee's men! O-wy-kee would like to meet him and pay him, with knife and tomahawk, for those he has laid low."

A sudden idea flashed across the mind of Mark. Bad as he was, however, he shrunk from broaching it until he should have tried every means in his power to persuade O-wy-kee to spare the life of Lynx-eye.

Vain, however, all his efforts. O-wy-kee would not endure the thought of sparing his great enemy. He would, however, hold a council upon the subject with some of his best men.

Accordingly these were summoned, and soon the chief's lodge was filled with dusky warriors, all holding consultation in those low, solemn tones peculiar to the red-men when conversing among themselves.

The gleam of the eyes, the firm compression of the mouth, proclaimed to Mark what he had to expect, even before the chief announced that it was unanimously decided that Lynx-eye should die.

The messenger, perceiving that it were vain to combat this decision, now proposed the sparing of Ward's life long enough to secure Mary to him for a wife.

To this the Indian consented, after which

Mark repaired to the lodge which was to be his abode while he remained in the camp.

Half an hour later, a large party of warriors had left the camp, to lay in ambush for the white travelers. At the very moment Ward was examining the horse's tracks, there was an Indian right over his head—one of the red-men's scouts—peering down at him, with a sort of wistful fierceness in his eyes, while his hand kept wandering to the tomahawk he had been instructed not to use against the trapper.

From his position in the tree, the Indian could almost see his party of fifty red-men, crouching behind a line of shrubbery, about two hundred yards in advance of Ward.

Meanwhile the glances of Gnarl, the dwarf, were ever wandering to and fro. The pigmy sat upon his horse as straight as a dart, so that every time he turned his head it looked as if it were moved by springs.

The wily Indian had ensconced himself behind a large limb where the foliage was the thickest, and where it would have been impossible for the party below to see his form even had they glanced up.

Finally, as Gnarl rode on, he turned his head, and *did* glance toward the tree.

Noticing the direction of his glance, the trapper looked the same way, when he saw something which tempted him to take a closer survey. This was a slight movement of the leaves, lasting but a few seconds, yet which seemed rather unnatural to Ward, as there was not a breath of air stirring.

The movement could not have been made without a cause. A suspicion flashed like lightning athwart the mind of the trapper, when, stooping over, he whispered to Gnarl.

The latter instinctively laid a hand on his rifle.

"Hist! not so quick. You kin bet thar's other Injuns around, not far off."

"Perhaps a bird made the leaves move," said Gnarl.

"No bird kin move a whole branch!"

"Why do you think there are other Indians around?"

"For a good reason. Ef thar war not, that chap in the tree under which we rode would have used his tomahawk, you may be sart'in."

While he spoke, Ward had been careful not to glance toward the tree, and had not thought it necessary to warn Gnarl to use the same precaution. The latter, however, unthinkingly turned, at this moment, and glanced at the object of which the two were speaking.

"Thar, you've sp'iled all!" exclaimed the trapper, quickly unslinging his rifle from his back. As he did so, the lynx-eyed watcher in the tree, who had not failed to notice that second glance, and to at once surmise therefrom that the two men knew he was there, sprang straight up and uttered a wild whoop that rung through wood and valley with startling distinctness.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRISONERS.

MARY WARD, who, while she suspected from the low-voiced conversation the men held to her, that peril was at hand, had not guessed

where or from what direction to expect it, turned pale, and trembled from head to foot.

"Come, now, don't be skeered, darter! Remember, thar's Ward blood in your veins!"

At this, Mary endeavored to rally her spirits, although the sight now meeting her gaze might have appalled a stouter heart than hers.

Springing up, as if by magic, from the line of shrubbery mentioned, the fifty red warriors, mounted upon fleet horses, now came dashing toward the party, their hair waving upon the wind, their eyes gleaming fiercely, their painted faces reddening like coals of fire!

Aloft they flourished their deadly tomahawks, while guiding their steeds with but one hand, their wild whoops splitting the air like screaming bomb-shells.

"No, don't be afraid," exclaimed the dwarf; "our horses are fleet, and even if they overtake us, they shall step over my dead body, sweet miss, before they harm a hair of your pretty head!"

As he spoke, the three dashed away from the pursuing savages with great speed, Gnarl gallantly bringing up the rear. The pigmy was in fact so full of defiance and warlike ardor, that he whirled himself completely round, and grasping the tail of his horse with one hand, shook his disengaged fist at his enemies!

As he passed under the tree, there was a yell like a panther's, when down upon the back of the pigmy's horse dropped the Indian who had kept watch.

With an elfin scream, Gnarl, feeling the hand of the red-man upon his throat, made a spring from the back of his horse to the ground. The next moment a tomahawk went whizzing within an inch of his head, and he was surrounded by a party of the Indians, while the rest continued their pursuit of his companions.

Ward and his daughter might have escaped if the latter's horse, striking a projecting stump, had not been prostrated upon its knees, and then become unmanageable. This delay insured the capture of the two, when many a fierce eye was turned upon Ward, while as many hands grasped knives and tomahawks with a firmer hold.

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Mary, in agony, as the captured ones were conducted on, "there is no hope for us, now."

So thought Ward, who could not hope that the Indians would spare his life. The fact that he had escaped them for twenty years, to be captured now, while on the way to take possession of his fortune, was peculiarly aggravating. What might be the fate of his daughter, in the hands of such a foe, he dared not even think.

Mary endeavored to keep up her spirits and not show the terror by which she was affected, for the sake of her father, who, as they rode on, endeavored to cheer and soothe his girl.

The dwarf, also, who was not far off, would now and then utter cheering words.

"You may be certain," he remarked, "that I will do all I can for you, miss, and perhaps my eloquence—for I *am* eloquent when I choose to be—may suffice to persuade the Indians to eventually let you go."

Seated upon the back of a horse, between two tall Indians, Gnarl was obliged, every time he

spoke, to thrust out his head from between them to make himself heard. Every time he did this, the tail of his cap, which he held between his legs for safe-keeping, would project straight up, giving him the appearance of a monkey or some other creature with a caudal appendage. This, probably, was why the Indians, with that peculiar grim fun characterizing savage tribes, gave him the appellation of *Cat-tail*.

"Cat-tail better keep mouth shut!" said one of his guard; "too much talk."

"I believe in freedom of speech!" answered the dwarf, straightening himself. "You would never have captured me had I not fallen from my horse. I would have laid low two of you, at least, and then have made off like lightning!"

The nasal twang permeating the bull-frog voice, seemed to excite the curiosity of his two Indian guards.

"How call, Cat-tail? Yaonkee (Yankee) English?"

Understanding that he was asked his nationality, the dwarf, picking up his cap, waved it round his head.

"My father and mother were Frenchmen. Long live *La Belle France*, long flourish the glorious place of my nativity, the bright city of New Orleans!"

The manner of the speaker seemed to amuse the Indians. Several words were exchanged; they touched their foreheads, asking each other if the dwarf was not insane. It was evidently decided at length that he was not.

Finally the party reached the camp, when from the lodges poured forth numbers of the dusky occupants to look at the new arrivals.

The clamor of the squaws, at sight of Lynx-eye, was louder than the screams of a flock of crows, while his beautiful daughter elicited much scoffing and jeering—the outpouring of feminine jealousy. Meanwhile the men stood looking on with grave, stern attention, while many a fiery eye was turned, with looks of admiration, upon Mary, and tiger-like fierceness upon the noted trapper. As to Gnarl, although he drew himself up with his usual dignity and frowned fearlessly upon the red-men, not one of them deigned to notice him. This mortified his vanity, and his brow grew blacker every moment. Finally the captives were conducted to a large hut not far from the chief's, and there, the trapper only being bound hand and foot, were left in charge of a guard of three youthful warriors.

Hours passed. The sun was going down, its red light streaming upon the camp, and the columns of mist floating along like phantoms over and through the branches of the trees. The red light falling upon the forms of the Indian men, women and children strolling through the camp, gave a highly picturesque effect to the scene.

Mary sat gazing through the tent upon the charming scene, which, at another time, would have thrilled her with delight. Now, however, her heart was throbbing wildly, with ill-concealed anxiety, as she expected every moment that the Indians would come to carry her father off to the dreaded stake for torture.

Even while the thought was uppermost, the

door of the lodge was darkened by the figure of the chief, O-wy-kee, who stood glowering down upon Lynx-eye, as if he thought the latter would be much impressed by his warlike appearance.

Ward, however, returned his glance with the utmost indifference, while Gnarl drew himself straight up like a little rooster, cocking his head and eyes sideways, with an air of comical dignity.

"Ugh! sit down, Cat-tail!" remarked the chief, contemptuously, as, with a single push of his powerful arm, he sent the dwarf flat upon his back.

Then, turning upon the trapper:

"It is all over with Lynx-eye!"

Mary uttered a half-stifled cry of fear.

"The White Swan may not be afraid. She shall become the bride of Red Eagle, O-wy-kee's son."

"Injun!" cried Ward, sternly, "sooner than see my darter the wife of a red-skin, I would have her tomahawked before my eyes! Sich are her sentiments, too, ain't they, Molly?"

"Yes," answered Mary, her bosom heaving with wild grief, as she thought of noble Long-shot, "I would sooner die than be an Indian's wife!"

"The White Swan must not die! The Eagle's eye has marked her for his!" So saying, he turned upon Ward.

"Lynx-eye dies at set of sun!"

"He is not afraid of death!" answered Ward, with perfect coolness.

Mary, however, was thrilled with agony at the news.

"Oh, father! father!" she cried, throwing both arms round his neck, "they shall not part us! I will die with you!"

The chief quitted the lodge. Several Indians entered to lead forth the trapper. Mary clung frantically to his neck, moaning, sobbing, as if her heart would break.

"Oh, father! they shall not take you!"

"Let go of me, Moll," said Ward. "Remember you're my darter, and mustn't show the white feather. I would hev you show the pesky squaws what a white gal kin do!"

"Yes!" exclaimed Gnarl, "glory to the white girls, and 1 erdition to the squaws. Cheer up, miss, and don't despond yet. Remember I am still with you."

"Your poor little carcass," said Ward, eying Cat-tail with much commiseration, "will probably roast with mine! Thar won't be much sizzle to sich a little piece of meat!"

The Indians now advanced and laid hands upon the trapper, as if to drag him forth.

At that moment, however, the lodge-door admitted two figures, the chief and—to the astonishment of the whites—the person of Mark Wylde.

"Hello!" exclaimed Ward. "Why, this *are* unexpected!"

Mary turned pale and drew back, apparently as much afraid of this man as of the Indians.

"How came you hyar?" queried the trapper. "You ain't a pris'ner, I should judge."

"No. I came here on business for Wilkins, with whom, as you well know, these Indians are on friendly terms."

"I've heard of it."

"Yes. He gets skins of them cheaper than he gets them of the trappers."

"And thar'y hurts the white trapper fur the red; cuss him fur that!"

"Still he does good. He has many a time by his influence prevented the Osages from attacking the white settlements."

"P'r'aps so—p'r'aps not."

"Well, I am here on his business."

"You can save us then! Oh! you can save my father!" exclaimed Mary, clasping her hands and glancing up at him with a face that might have moved a heart of stone.

"Yes, I can save you both," said Mark, "but it will have to be on conditions, I'm afraid."

"Any thing! any thing!" cried Mary, eagerly.

"It is well, then. The chief wants you to wed with his son. You must either do that or marry me, on which condition your father's life will be spared, and you both set at liberty."

"Seems to me this are a strange bizness!" cried Ward. "Why is the chief willing you should marry Mary, and to spare my life on that ground? I hope you ain't deceiving us, Mark!"

"I ain't deceiving you," answered the latter. "As you ought to know, I am related to this tribe by my mother, who was one of them."

"I hev heerd men say so."

"Well, ef I marry Mary, who is your daughter, it will be the making of peace between you and these Injuns."

"How so?"

"You would not remain the enemy of your son-in-law's people? You would not raise a band of whites, as it has been reported you intended doing, to drive the Osages from their country. Their country would become your daughter's."

"All this is neither hyar nor thar. My darter won't marry you."

"Death sooner," answered Mary, firmly.

"Perhaps you will think better of it," said Mark.

Then he turned, and conversed in low tones with the chief for several moments.

"Is that your decision?" he continued, turning toward the girl.

"Yes," roared Ward. "I would not let her do that to save my life, even were she so inclined."

"It is the only alternative," said Mark. "However, hoping that you may change your mind, I have persuaded the chief to give you two days to think the matter over."

So saying, he turned upon his heel, and with the Indians, he quitted the lodge.

"Father!" exclaimed Mary, in agony, throwing both arms round her parent's neck. "Oh, father, what *are* we to do?"

"Hush, child!" answered Ward, half pityingly, half sternly; "you must bear up bravely. We must not let the red-skins see that we are afraid to die!"

"No," said little Gnarl, solemnly, "we must bear up like heroes!"

He folded his arms as he spoke, pursed up his mouth, and cocked his eye up toward the top of the lodge.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ESCAPE.

NIGHT, with no moon, but the darkness faintly relieved by starlight, closed round the camp. All the Indians, save those guarding the prisoners' lodge, had evidently retired, a few hours later, as a deep silence now reigned throughout the place.

Ward and his daughter were conversing in low tones, while Gnarl, crouching in a corner, like some weird ghost, sat watching them.

As previously stated, Gnarl's hands and arms had been left unbound, the Indians not probably having fear of this little pigmy's trying to accomplish anything by way of escape. His knife, however, and every weapon, in fact, which he possessed, had been taken from him, otherwise he might have contrived to sever the thongs binding the arms and legs of his more doughty companion, Ward.

Soon the eyes and ears of the dwarf were busy. Hearing a neighing, not far from the lodge, he at once comprehended that the Indians' horses were picketed near. Creeping to the side of the lodge opposite the entrance, he peered through a crevice, which afforded him an indistinct view of the outlines of the horses, not twenty yards distant.

Feeling of the poles of the lodge, he now concluded that these could be easily displaced without attracting the attention of the Indians on the other side of it. He must be very careful, however, when doing this, as the guard, frequently walking round the lodge, would pause right in front of the very place where he intended effecting an opening.

In a whisper, he now communicated his plan to Ward.

"I will creep through the lodge—I will mount a horse, and, fleet as the hurricane, ride to Fort Brown and bring aid to you!"

"All very well," said the trapper, "provided yer kin succeed, which I think are doubtful."

"I can try."

"Yes, yer kin try."

He pinched the dwarf's arm, for at that moment the tread of an Indian was heard outside the lodge, followed almost immediately by a painted face, thrust through the front opening. Perceiving that "all was right," the dusky guard withdrew, when Cat-tail commenced operations.

Slowly and cautiously working, he soon succeeded in effecting an opening large enough for his small body to pass through. He thrust out his hand, and was about crawling forth, when the appearance of one of the guard caused him to withdraw inside, just in time to escape observation. Seated with his back to the opening, the latter was not perceived by the Indian, owing to the intense darkness. A moment later, the red-man having passed round to the other side of the lodge, Gnarl emerged therefrom, and cautiously and swiftly drawing himself along on his belly, succeeded in reaching the bower occupied by the horses.

To unfasten the thong holding one was with Cat-tail the work of a moment; the next he was about mounting the animal, when, glancing to the left, he beheld the outline of an Indian's

head thrust through the opening of a lodge not more than ten yards off.

He crouched down among the horses, and watched the head keenly. Notwithstanding the deep darkness, he could see the eyes of the native gleaming through the gloom like specks of fire, and at once argued that his suspicions were excited. Such, indeed, must have been the case, as the fellow now emerged from the lodge and advanced stealthily toward the horses.

The dwarf, seeing that discovery was inevitable vaulted upon the back of the nearest speed, with one supple spring, and sent the animal careering away from the camp like the wind.

Behind him, at the same moment, he heard a wild, prolonged yell, soon followed by the flashing of torches all over the camp.

It does not take an Indian long to ascertain the direction pursued by an escaped foe. The sounds of the receding horse's hoofs at once convinced the red-men that Gnarl had taken a hard, clay path, leading in the northwesterly direction from the camp.

Toward this quarter they therefore urged their steeds, and, in a short time, the foremost Indian came in sight of the outlines of little Cat-tail, perched like a ball upon his lofty seat.

Gnarl could also see the Indians fast gaining upon him, owing to their better knowledge of the country, which enabled them to ride straight forward without hesitation, whereas the dwarf, constantly fearing that his horse might stumble or fall into some unexpected marsh or gully, was obliged to proceed with a caution which materially lessened his speed.

Keeping on, he finally thought he saw, yawning right ahead of him, a deep chasm or gully.

By this time he had proceeded about six miles, so that the foremost of his pursuers, gaining every mile, was now within less than a hundred yards of him.

Evidently aware of the presence of the gully, into which he doubted not horse and rider would be precipitated, the Indian, with keen eye marking the outline of the fugitive, lifted the rifle he carried, and took good aim, eager to secure the scalp of Cat-tail before the gully should swallow his prize.

Bang! went the rifle, when, with a shriek, Gnarl threw up his arms and fell upon the edge of the chasm, just as his horse, frightened by the report, made a tremendous spring, which carried him to the other side of the abyss!

Poor Gnarl! down, down, down he rolled, and would have been dashed to pieces upon the rocks at the bottom of the deep gully but for his form catching upon a shelving rock, which would have been concealed from the view of any person above, even in broad daylight, by a thick clump of laurel bushes.

Little, however, it would seem, did it matter whether poor Cat-tail were thus caught or precipitated to the bottom of the abyss, for he lay upon his back without sense or motion, his half-closed eyes turned up like glass beads through the intricate leaves.

Up came Indian after Indian to the verge of the gully. Torches flashed, and the red-men ran hither and thither looking along the edge of the rift to see if the form of the fugitive had there lodged.

Not finding it after a careful search, they concluded that the dwarf had rolled to the bottom and been dashed to pieces, when they returned, much mortified, to camp.

They who had been in the rear thought that both horse and rider might have cleared the abyss, as it had been cleared on several trying occasions; but the foremost Indian was certain his shot had taken effect, as he had heard the rider scream and seen him fall.

Next morning the chief came to the lodge occupied by the two prisoners.

"Cat-tail think very cunning. Indian cunning as fox and eagle," he said, peering in upon Lynx-eye.

"What mean you?" inquired the latter.

"Why let Cat-tail go? Too little take care of himself—like one small squaw."

"Will yer or won't yer explain yerself, O-wy-kee?" cried Ward anxiously.

In his usual brief manner the chief stated that the dwarf had been dashed to pieces on the rocks of the gully.

As he said this, the Indian fixed his glittering eyes keenly upon the trapper, eager to read and gloat over the disappointment which he fancied such tidings would excite.

During his long experience, however, in a calling which had brought him in such frequent contact with the red-man and the half-breed, Ward had caught something of the Indian nature—at least so far as concerned the controlling of any outward exhibition of his feelings.

On the present occasion, therefore, he listened with the utmost calmness to a statement which, in reality, deprived him of every vestige of hope. Mary, not so skilled in governing the expression of her feelings, turned deadly pale, and, clasping her hands, looked at her father in mute grief, a choking sensation in her throat preventing her from uttering a word.

Over her misery the red-men exulted.

"White girl be ready! Thirty-three hours must choose. Be wife of Mark, or chief's son, or fader die!"

With these words, he quitted the lodge.

"Mary," said the trapper, in low, stern voice, when the Indian was gone, "I never had sich a bad opinion of that Mark as now. Thar are sart'inly underhand work in this bizness! The fellow being related to and having the friendship of these 'ere red-skins, could save us, ef he chose, without enny sich oldtarnation (alternative) as that he speaks of."

"So I think," answered Mary, with tears in her eyes. "I always mistrusted the man—always thought his character base! At all events, I could never love him; and it always surprised me that you seemed rather to favor him than not!"

"Darter, he are a rich man, and would give yer the place that belongs to an eddicated gal like you. That war the only reason. Besides, I had never heerd an' thing ag'in' him. Now, however, I know him to be a pesky varmint."

"Alas! no hope for us now!" sighed the young girl. "Gnarl being dead, the Fort Brown people will not know of our situation, at least, not until it be too late! And as for Long-shot, he is ignorant—"

"Hush!" cried Ward, sternly. "Don't yer

mention that chap's name to me. I respect him, because he are a remarkable good shot, and there are, I don't think, nothin' wicked in his natur'. Still, he are not the man for my gal."

Mary sighed and hung her head.

"It are a pesky pity," continued Ward, "that the little dwarf hev lost his life. He war a good rider, and might hev reached Fort Brown by this time, as it aren't further than thirty miles from hyar."

Even while the trapper spoke, something happened about six miles from the camp, which would have surprised and gladdened him could he have been apprised of it.

Down in the gully, at the bottom of which the Indians supposed the remains of the dwarf were lying, Gnarl, who had lain all night in unconsciousness, upon the shelf of rock, suddenly raised himself to a sitting posture, and turning his huge head in all directions, glanced round him in a bewildered manner.

CHAPTER V.

UNEXPECTED MEETING.

SOME time elapsed before the dwarf could remember past events.

Gradually everything grew clear to his mind, up to the period when he was precipitated from his horse into the gully.

That he had been thrown from the animal after being struck by a shot or some weapon, was now evident to his mind. He felt all over his face and head for some injury; then looking at his hands, he perceived that there was blood upon them?

Where did this blood come from?

He soon discovered that it came from his temple, which was badly bruised; the skin had been torn off by some missile; and now remembering, with the clew to guide him, that he heard a rifle just before losing his senses, he at once concluded that the wound was from a bullet!

The bullet had simply torn the skin from his temple, striking him hard enough to deprive him of his senses. Rising to his feet, the dwarf now took a careful survey of his situation, to perceive that he had rolled a considerable distance before striking the rocky shelf. His preservation from severe injury was simply due to the fact that the side of the gully, down which he had rolled, was not very steep, and was covered with shrubbery, which had broken the impetuosity of his fall.

Had he not fallen just in this line, he must have been carried to the bottom of the gully, which, from this point, was invisible to him, although he could discover that its sides were very steep—straight up and down!

"Well, here I am," said Gnarl, as he folded his arms, turning his head from side to side. "Here I am without horse or arms, while my friends are in an Indian camp, to scone meet their fate. 'A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse.'"

He was careful not to speak very loud, fearful that Indians might be lurking in the vicinity.

"I am weak, tired and hungry," he continued, "but I will get to Fort Brown or die in the attempt."

Then he reflected as to the direction he should take to get to Fort Brown. He had stopped at that place on his way to Ward's with the letter, and being acquainted with the country between this and New Orleans, which he had often traversed in company with land-surveyors, he concluded that he could reach the fort if not waylaid and prevented by Indians.

Crawling to the top of the gully, he glanced round him, to see, far away, a thin smoke, proclaiming the direction of the Indian camp.

To the southwest, extending along beyond the tops of waving groves of beautiful trees, he beheld a range of hills, which he at once remembered to have seen and passed just before reaching Fort Brown.

"The fort lies in that direction. It cannot be more than twenty-five miles from this very spot," muttered the dwarf.

Accordingly he started in the direction of the hills, being first obliged to pass around the gully.

The sun was now about an hour high. The golden light streamed down upon the dew-covered grass, speckled with beautiful wild-flowers, the shadows of the swaying trees and passing clouds looked beautiful upon the sward, and the songs of thousands of birds filled the air with melody.

Having slaked his thirst from a spring of fresh water, he felt refreshed, and quickening his steps, proceeded with renewed vigor. A little ways further on, he made a meal of a couple of bunches of wild grapes, which, by good fortune, he found growing in a clump of bushes.

Onward he then went; but he had not gone much further when he felt a severe pain in his head. It was evident that the bullet had injured his skull, and possibly affected his brain. He ignored the feeling a long time; but soon his head grew dizzy, while a continual mist, seeming to float before his eyes, obscured his vision bewildering him.

The bad feeling grew worse every moment, a sensation of faintness came over him, and he finally fell to the ground, no longer able to resist it.

Approaching this very spot, a friend was at that moment not more than five miles distant.

This was young Kit Swift—"Long-shot"—who, mounted upon a good horse, was riding forward at a rate which, if he kept on, must soon bring him to the spot occupied by the dwarf.

Long-shot, after he had ridden away from Ward's cabin, had repaired to the lodgings he occupied at Batesville, which were kept by an old couple who had conceived a great friendship for the young man. These old people on the following day, brought to him the news of the intended departure of Ward and his daughter for New Orleans.

The knowledge that the girl he loved was to traverse so large a tract of country infested by hostile Indians, naturally excited the anxiety of the young man, who resolved to follow at a distance, so as to be ready, at any moment, to assist the trapper and his daughter in case of emergency.

To the old couple he expressed his intentions, but he was persuaded to defer his departure

until the following day, as his wound would otherwise trouble him, and ultimately prevent his purpose of following his friends very far.

Accordingly, waiting until the day after the two had departed, Long-shot had then set out, carefully following the tracks of the horses, and noting every sign which would give him a hint of the sweet girl he was following. A little piece of pink ribbon, a hair-pin, the half of a broken comb, were treasures of inestimable value to the ardent lover, who, in fancy, could every moment see the beautiful form and soft eyes of the girl he adored.

At length he came upon certain signs which drove away every other thought except that of the safety of the young girl.

The signs mentioned were those of pursuit and capture; horses' tracks crossing and recrossing, and a broken spear lodged in the trunk of the tree in which the Indian watcher had been seated!

The quick eye of Long-shot at once read and truthfully translated these marks; the trapper, his daughter and Gnarl had all been captured, perhaps scalped!

He followed the horses' tracks carefully, until, suddenly, he lost them on the bank of a stream, which the party had crossed. Crossing this stream, the young man looked in vain for the continuation of the tracks, although he felt certain that the party had crossed it.

This, however, inspired him with hope. The fact that the Indians had taken pains to conceal their trail convinced him that they had not scalped their prisoners when first capturing them.

To find the broken trail, was now his object. He searched the bank of the stream, up and down, for a considerable distance, and yet could not discover a sign of Indians having passed that way.

In this dilemma, there was but one course for Long-shot to pursue; to choose between a west, a southwest and northwest course, to bring him again upon the track of those he was in search of.

After much reflection, the young man concluded to strike to the southwest, and if not successful in that way, to try one of the other directions.

He had followed this course for about seven miles without again coming upon the trail, at the moment when Gnarl, as stated, lay almost unconscious in the thicket.

Straight toward that thicket he rode, and in a few minutes, had he continued his way, he would have come upon the dwarf!

Fortune, however, which sometimes favors, more often proves fickle, as was the case in the present instance.

Long-shot kept right on, as stated, and was almost within sound of the dwarf's voice, when the sight of several horsemen, far away upon the horizon, from this point revealed by a vista in the far-extending groves of trees, caused him, in his eagerness to watch the riders, to deviate slightly from his course. Turning to the left, he now followed a direction which carried him, every moment, further and further from the fainting dwarf!

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE WATCH.

KEENLY watching the riders, the young man soon discovered that they were Indians, and directed his horse behind a clump of shrubbery.

Watching the red-men carefully, Long-shot saw them at length disappear behind a thick grove of trees, and believing they were of the party which captured his three friends, he concluded that, by following them, unobserved, he might come upon the whereabouts of the prisoners. To do this, required extreme caution, as the Indians might at any moment emerge from behind the trees, and thus come in sight of him.

Keeping more in the shadow, he continued riding on, until, through an opening in a glade, he again caught sight of the savages.

Soon after they disappeared behind a thicket, and, although Long-shot maneuvered for hours, he did not again see them.

Just before sundown, however, he came upon their tracks, and followed these until they branched off in different directions, showing that the three had separated.

Hesitating which to follow, Long-shot at length concluded to trail those leading toward the northwest.

He had not gone far when he came to the bank of a stream, half concealed by a thick growth of underwood. Here he paused, resolving to wait until morning before continuing his way.

Already the sun was low, and its red light streamed weirdly through the branches of the trees over the young man's head, falling in long lines upon the clear waters of the stream, the bottom of which, about eleven feet below the surface, could be distinctly seen, with singular-looking aquatic plants growing from it.

Long-shot, having partaken of a frugal supper, contained in a haversack at his side, stood by his faithful horse, his eyes fixed dreamily upon the clear waters of the stream, when his attention was attracted by a slight movement in the shrubbery on the opposite bank. As there was no wind, this at once excited his suspicions. Cocking his rifle, he was about advancing, when a mass of gorgeous feathers moving through the green bushes convinced him that the motion had been caused by some bird, the plumage of which was now before him.

Lowering his rifle, he stood mechanically watching this beautiful bunch of feathers, until it struck him that they remained too long motionless to belong to a bird.

As this thought passed through his mind he saw a steel-like glitter beneath the feathers, gleaming distinctly through the leaves.

The next moment a flash of fire broke from the shrubbery—there was a crash, and a bullet, passing within an inch of the young man's temple, struck his horse and leveled the poor creature to the ground in the agonies of death.

Up, with a wild yell from the bushes, rose he who had discharged the rifle—a tall, red-plumed Indian, in the weird garb of the Osage tribe.

Perceiving that his bullet had missed its destination, and that Long-shot was about shooting, the savage, knowing too well the unerring aim of the young trapper, plunged into the

stream, just as the white man's rifle was discharged.

The bullet passing over his head, the red-man, who had swum under water, sprang up the bank and drew his tomahawk.

For a moment the two stood looking at each other. The Indian, none other than Red Eagle, the son of O-wy-kee, had long been hunting for the celebrated Long-shot, who had won considerable renown by his daring, and the unerring aim of his rifle. To capture this man or take his scalp would reflect great credit upon the young brave, who was anxious to signalize himself by some such deed, and thus deserve the reputation which the tribe's prophet had pictured as his destiny.

Long-shot at once perceived that he had no mean antagonist to deal with, especially at close quarters, the Indian being as wiry and supple as an eel.

"Ugh!" gritted the savage, showing his teeth, when Long-shot, who had clubbed his rifle, advanced a step toward him, as if inviting combat.

Then the Indian, raising his tomahawk, made a terrific blow at the young hunter, who, however, dodging it, struck him upon the head with the stock of his rifle. The Indian having partially avoided the blow, did not fall, but, springing under the other's arm, caught him by the throat and lifted his tomahawk. As the young man could not use his rifle at such close quarters, he drew his knife, and, avoiding the tomahawk, had aimed a blow at the savage, when the crack of a rifle was heard in the distance, and, with a yell, over went the Indian, falling headlong into the stream.

At the same moment, glancing in the direction whence the rifle had been discharged, Long-shot beheld the scalp-locks of several Indians protruding above the bushes as they made toward the stream.

This convinced the young man that the rifle had been fired at him; that the savages were friends of the one with whom he had been struggling, and that, not having, in their haste, paused to see the effect of their shot, they were now coming to the native's assistance.

An instant's reflection convinced him that the best way to escape capture would be to climb up into one of the trees near the stream.

Within a few yards of him there was a tall chestnut, with thick branches, which would afford an excellent place of concealment. Up this he climbed, and was soon ensconced amid the foliage, whence he could not only obtain a good view of the stream, directly beneath him, but could also now and then catch a glimpse of his foes as they approached.

From them his gaze was soon drawn to the stream, in which the Indian who had been struck by a friend's bullet was now in a singularly fearful situation.

The waters, as remarked, were of mirror-like clearness, so that the spectator could detect every movement of the drowning savage. He had evidently been struck in the side by the bullet, as a long stream of blood was visible trickling therefrom and staining the clear depths of the stream. He had sunk to the bottom, and in his struggles his leg had caught in the tangle-

grass there growing, and which had become twisted firmly around the limb, so that he could not extricate himself. Thus caught, he floated in an upright position, his wild, painted face upturned, his eyes open and staring, his arms moving to and fro. The struggles of the Indian to free himself from the clasping tendrils so excited the pity of Long-shot, albeit the man was his deadly foe, that he would have attempted the latter's rescue but for the close vicinity of the other natives, who would have pounced upon him the moment he should have drawn the savage from the stream. Even this consideration would not have withheld him, were he not searching for the girl whose life he deemed worth more than the lives of all the red and white men put together. For her sake, he must not throw away his own.

Slower—slower—slower moved the arms, until they finally became motionless, stiffly outstretched with the palms open and the fingers wide apart, while the glazed eyes, now losing their fire, resembled balls of lead.

Meanwhile, the sun having by this time sunk, the gathering shades were fast veiling that ghastly form under water; so that by the time the Indian's friends arrived upon the bank of the stream, they were unable to see it, the water by this time being blackened by the shadows of the trees.

Carefully examining the ground, and also Long-shot's dead horse, the Indians seemed to partially comprehend what had happened, for several glances were turned toward the stream.

That both of the combatants had been drowned, they seemed to infer, as their tracks were not traceable from this spot. For some time they stood, holding council together, and finally seated themselves under the very tree in which the young trapper was ensconced.

By-and-by a silvery flood of light streaming down through the branches of the trees, betokened the rising of the moon. As the light became clearer, Long-shot, glancing toward the stream, could dimly see, far down in the water, the outline of that ghastly form entangled among the plants. The Indians, had they walked to the edge of the bank, and peered into the water, might also have seen it; but this did not happen.

Having conversed together a few minutes longer, the red-men, walking along the bank of the stream to where it was shallow enough to be waded, crossed and soon disappeared from the gaze of the solitary watcher. Long-shot then descended the tree, and giving his poor horse a farewell glance, plunged into the shrubbery, and crossing the water where his foes had preceded him, he followed, unobserved, upon their tracks.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTURE.

MEANWHILE poor Gnarl, in the chicket, had thrown himself upon his back, and thus prevented consciousness from leaving him. Gradually the whirl in his brain subsided, and finally, deeming himself now able to continue his journey, he crept forward, in the course of half an hour emerging from the woods.

Here was now before him an open plain, ex-

tending to the range of hills mentioned, far beyond which, at the distance of fifteen miles, lay Fort Brown.

The dwarf had nearly gained the hills, when a feeling of irresistible weakness seized him, and again he felt that ominous whirl in his brain.

"I will reach that fort!" he exclaimed, clinching his fist. "When was the time that I failed to do what I undertook?"

Pausing a few moments for rest, he again continued his way, and after sundown he had succeeded in reaching the summit of one of the hills mentioned. Thence, gazing far away to the westward, over a country open for many miles, he beheld a dim speck on the horizon.

Was this a white man or an Indian? He resolved to decide this before proceeding further, and therefore remained watching the speck, until it gradually assumed the proportions of an approaching horseman.

As the person drew nearer, little Cat-tail took his hat from his head and waved it wildly in exultation.

The rider was now near enough for him to make out a white man, mounted upon a powerful-looking brown horse. He concluded at once that it was a friend, who would not hesitate, when he heard Gnarl's story, to hurry to Fort Brown with the news.

Creeping down the hill he continued his way over the plain, and soon met the horseman, whom he at once recognized as a person he had seen visit Ward's cabin, and whom Mary called uncle.

In fact, this was no other than Wilkins, on his way to meet a party of trappers in relation to some skins, which he was to transmit for them to some of the northern settlements.

"Hello! Who are you and how came you here?" was his first question, as he rode toward the dwarf.

On coming nearer, he recognized the latter as the person who had brought Ward the letter, and had subsequently set out with him for New Orleans.

In a few words the unsuspecting Gnarl related the capture and his subsequent escape.

"You are a cunning fellow," said Wilkins, "to escape from such sharp fellows as those Osages."

"It was by the accident in the gully that I got clear," was the reply. "And now, let us fly to Fort Brown, as soon as possible, with our news."

"Fort Brown," answered Wilkins, "is a long distance from here."

"We can reach it before morning."

"I am not so sure of that. Besides, what will be the use, if we do? Do you not know that the fort is deserted?"

"I did not know that."

"Yes. We had better go to Batesville. Fort Brown's men are all there, as there have been rumors of an attack upon the town."

"It will take us over a day to ride to Batesville."

"Yes; another day to reach the Osages! Still, that may not be too late."

"I will save them or die!" cried Gnarl, with dignity. "Come, let us away!"

"You look both tired and hungry," said Wilkins. "You had better eat something first"—

thrusting a hand into a haversack he carried at his side.

"I can eat as we ride along."

"Very well; mount behind me, then."

He helped the dwarf upon the horse, then turning the animal round, rode in the direction of Batesville.

Perched upon the horse, with one hand grasping the arm of his companion, while with the other he munched a cracker and a piece of meat, the dwarf formed a grotesque picture, not unworthy the hand of an artist.

Meanwhile, Wilkins urged his horse forward at a great pace; the animal seemed rather to fly through the air than to go over the ground.

"This is what I like!" exclaimed Gnarl, as, owing to his awkward seat, he bounded up and down like a ball.

Just then Wilkins directed the horse over a wide hollow in the ground, taking it at a flying leap.

The suddenness of the motion caused Cat-tail to nearly lose his balance. He fell backward, and would have tumbled headlong to the ground, but for his grasping his companion by the tail of his coat—a short garment resembling a shooting-jacket.

By putting an arm behind him, and grasping the dwarf's shoulder, Wilkins might easily have helped him back to his position; but he made no such attempt, leaving the other to scramble for himself.

With much difficulty the little fellow righted upon his seat.

"Why did you not help me?" he then exclaimed. "Perhaps you think I am not of sufficient importance."

"It was as much as I could do to attend to the horse," replied Wilkins. "Had you fallen and broken your head, it would not have been my fault."

His indifferent manner excited the wrath of dignified Gnarl.

"I really believe you think I am of no consequence!" he cried. "But I'll have you to understand that my name is Gnarl, and that my people were French Huguenots!"

"I care nothing about your people," replied Wilkins.

"Sir!" exclaimed Gnarl, in his usual frog-like voice, "after our friends are rescued from the Indians, I shall have an account to settle with you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Pistols—PISTOLS!"

"As I am the challenged party, I have a right to choose my weapons."

"Certainly—that privilege I grant," answered Gnarl, in voice of deadly solemnity.

"Well, then, I choose wooden swords!"

"Wooden? wooden?"

"With no points to them!"

"No points?"

"No; for fear I might hurt you."

"As true as my name is Gnarl, I'll make you pay for this insult!"

"Ha! ha! ha!"

Gnarl was too indignant to utter another word. He longed for some opportunity to make Wilkins appreciate his dignity.

The horse, meanwhile, was kept steadily

ahead for many miles at the same break-neck speed as at first. This somewhat mollified Gnarl. It was evident, he thought, that Wilkins was very much concerned about, and anxious to save his niece.

In fact, so great was the speed at which the two horsemen rode, that they came in sight of the village, dimly visible ahead, at three o'clock in the morning. Such a ride had exhausted both.

"Come," said Wilkins, when, at length, he pulled up before his house, "come in, and have some refreshments."

"How about alarming the Batesville people, and setting them after our friends at once?"

"Nay, we will have plenty of time. We can work better after we have refreshed ourselves."

"I believe you are right. As you say, we have plenty of time."

The house before which Wilkins had reined in his smoking steed, was an old-fashioned but comfortable two-story building, surrounded by a large plot of ground, containing plenty of shrubbery, and inclosed by a high wooden fence, on one side parallel with the road.

As the two passed up the front stoop, Gnarl noticed windows with iron bars to them close to the ground, at one side of the building.

"That has a dungeon-like look," said the dwarf.

"Yes. In these regions, where, as you doubtless know, we are at any moment apt to be attacked by Indians, we are obliged to take the precaution afforded by iron bars. The windows you see belong to my cellar, in which I sometimes keep my skins."

So saying, Wilkins knocked at the door, which was opened by a negress—a hideous-looking woman, with a scar extending from forehead to chin, and seeming to divide the face into two parts.

A lamp she held plainly revealed her ugly visage, the forehead of which was low and wrinkled, while the lips protruded uncommonly even for a negress.

Noticing how Gnarl stared at this woman, Wilkins said, indifferently:

"You are from New Orleans, and I suppose have seen plenty of negroes?"

"Yes; but—"

He checked himself.

"You never saw such an ugly one as this, you were going to say."

"Dat's what makes de *uglim*, massa," said the woman, with a grin, pointing at the visage-splitting scar.

"Hush, you fool!" exclaimed Wilkins, sternly, "and show us to the front room."

"Sart'in, massa, sart'in. 'Cuse dis nigga which war t'inkin' ob ole times."

Wilkins frowned at the woman, who, at sight of the lowering visage of her master, drew back with such suddenness that her head struck against a door behind her.

"Come, the front room!" roared Wilkins, in a voice of thunder.

The woman needed no third bidding. She at once conducted the two to the front room—a large apartment handsomely furnished with carpet and stuffed chairs.

"Bring wine and some cold meat," ordered Wilkins.

The wine and meat were brought, and deposited on a small round table, at which Wilkins and the dwarf were soon seated.

"Really," said the latter, as he proceeded to drink the sparkling liquor, "you know how to entertain gentlemen, and,

"I accept your courtesy, by heaven,
As freely as 'tis nobly given.'"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Wilkins, at the comical figure cut by the dwarf, who, while drinking his wine, had drawn himself up stiffly.

He plied his little guest freely with wine, while, in one corner of the room, waiting for any further order her master might give, sat the negress, her great white eyes fixed upon the dwarf, while a singular smile convulsed her mouth.

Wilkins's back was turned toward her, so that he could not see the singular contortions and motions which now and then she made to little Cat-tail.

She would laugh silently; then point at her scar with one hand, while, with the other, indicating Wilkins.

These significant movements could not be misunderstood. They implied that the scar had been given by her master.

"Really, I can't make this man out," thought Gnarl. "One moment he seems good enough, and the next does something to make me change my opinion."

Meanwhile Wilkins continued to ply his guest with wine, until the dwarf declared that he would not take another drop.

"Wait a moment," said Wilkins. "I will go and see if your bed is ready. You can stay here," he continued, sternly, as the negress rose to follow.

The woman sat down. The moment the door closed upon her master, she glided to the dwarf's side.

"See dar!" she cried, pointing to her scar; "dat show you what kind ob man massa is! Strike poor nigga wid hatchet, one day, 'cause she wanted few pennies to buy calico dress wid."

"Strange," said Gnarl; "he seems to be a good host."

At this the woman grinned horribly.

"Good, when want to cut t'roat!"

"What do you mean?"

"Not drunk?"

"Drunk? No, indeed," cried Gnarl, drawing up his huge head and folding his arms over his chest. "I could drink twice as much as I have without getting drunk."

"Den bes' t'ing you do is to go out ob de front door, and nebber come in dis house again!"

"Indeed," said Gnarl, "I cannot do that. Wilkins and I are going to lead an armed band, to-morrow, to rescue some friends from the Osages."

"True as dere's a *hebben* above us two, dere's mischief in dis matter. Massa play you trick!"

"You do not mean this?"

"Yes—yes, for sart'in I mean it. Don't t'ink Wilkins lead armed band 'gainst Osages, which am he perticklar friends!"

This set Gnarl to thinking. He questioned

the woman further, and thought that he could detect an air of truth in all that she said.

The peril of Ward and his daughter must not be trifled with in this manner. A doubt of Wilkins's honesty was enough to set the dwarf's brain forming all sorts of disagreeable conjectures.

Warned by the words of the negress, Gnarl finally concluded to take her advice.

Hearing the returning step of Wilkins, he sprung through the open window, about fifteen feet above the ground, and rushed for the gate, hoping to make his escape through it.

The wine, however, had not been without its effect, and, after blundering around from place to place, he finally found himself beneath a couple of tall trees, within a few yards of the house, with hurried steps sounding behind him.

The next moment Wilkins appeared, and catching him by the throat with vise-like grasp, drew him toward the house, in spite of all resistance.

In a few moments Gnarl was dragged down a flight of moss-covered steps, evidently leading into the cellar of the building. He was unable to speak, from the tightness of his captor's grasp about his throat, but his eyes, flashing balefully, betokened plainly to the other the fierce indignation raging within his breast.

"Bear a hand there!" cried Wilkins, firmly maintaining his hold of the captive—"bear a hand, you black she imp of darkness, or—"

Before the threat, whatever it was, could be uttered, a small door, at the foot of the steps, was thrown open, revealing the hideous negress, who stood, lamp in hand.

"There!" cried Wilkins, as he drew the youth into a low, damp apartment, whose walls were old and crumbling, "there! I have you fast at last, you little imp! Sarah, bring me the ball and chain!"

The negress obeyed. A ball and chain, such as are worn by military offenders in a guard-house, was brought, and poor Gnarl's ankles soon were clasped with the weighty links, while, owing to the shortness and peculiar knotty shape of his legs, he was prevented from moving them so as to rise to his feet.

"Wretch!" he exclaimed, glowering fiercely at Wilkins, "you shall pay dearly for this!"

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the other, while Sarah who had assisted her master to put on the incumbrance, joined in his mirth, although it was evident she did so from compulsion.

Wilkins was leaving the cellar, when Gnarl called out after him:

"You will rescue Mary Ward and her father! Surely, although I can not imagine why you have treated me so ill, you have nothing against them?"

To this Wilkins deigned no answer, but walked straight out of the door, which he fastened securely after Sarah had also passed through the opening.

"Dungeon and chains!" cried Gnarl, despairingly, finding himself now in total darkness. "Well, come Fate, as thou wilt, I will not despair!"

A day had passed before food was brought to him. The bearer was Sarah, who, as she deposited a pitcher of water and some dry bread

before the prisoner, grinned in her usual disagreeable manner.

"What is to be done with me? Am I to be kept here?"

"Dunno. Marsa drefful bad man. Believe he t'ink you spy."

Now Wilkins, in order to deceive both the dwarf and Sarah, had said to her that he believed Gnarl was a "wretched spy"—a half-breed from some hostile party of Indians, who had got him (Wilkins) to take him to Batesville, in order to find out the strength, nature, etc., of the place.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE TREE.

LONG-SHOT, with much difficulty, kept the Indians in sight, and finally found himself close upon their camp. In the dense shrubbery where he now was, there were plenty of hiding-places. He found an oak tree, climbing which he ensconced himself among the thick branches, resolved there to remain, to spy out what was going on in the camp.

Worn out with his long tramp and recent exertions, he fastened himself by means of some deerskin thongs carried in his pocket, to a large branch, and throwing himself back, was soon fast asleep.

The will of a person, resolved before closing his eyes to slumber a certain length of time, operates in sleep, and thus it was with Long-shot, who, accustomed to thus measuring his hours of slumber, awoke just before daylight. As the light gradually stole over the landscape, he ensconced himself deeper among the branches gazing toward the camp. Many of the Indians were up and stirring; he could see men, women and children moving about. Vainly, however, he looked for Mary Ward and her father, the prisoners, in fact, being still confined in the lodge.

The tints of the rising sun were now upon the sky. Gradually, the luminary, climbing the blue vault, shed floods of red and golden light upon the camp, lighting up fanciful costumes and wild, painted faces of the Osages with picturesque distinctness.

Suddenly, however, Long-shot beheld a different costume among the grotesque party—the hunting-shirt, pants, and leather leggings of a white man, whose face was turned from the watcher as he walked out of the chief's lodge, by the side of that person!

What could this mean? What white man was playing traitor to his own brethren, and entering into conspiracy with the red-skins?

Again and again Kit asked himself this question, but could not decide who the person was until by chance he turned his face toward him.

He was astonished to recognize Mark Wylde!

He had always disliked this person, had never believed him honest, but he had not supposed him capable of entering into a league with savages against his white brethren.

The men were now moving toward the tree. Soon they were close enough for Kit to catch a word or two, when he was certain he heard Mark mention the name of Lynx-eye and Mary Ward. He strained his ears to hear more.

but the twain, passing the tree, moved on, so that he could not catch what was further said. Still the mention of the young girl and her father now convinced him that the two were really prisoners in the camp.

Otherwise Mark would not have thought of speaking of them.

Hoping that the plotters would again come under the tree, Kit remained motionless and vigilant. All to no purpose. The white man and the chief soon passed into the latter's lodge, whence the lookout did not see them again emerge during that day.

Up in the tree Long-shot remained, steadily watching the camp until the sun had gone down, and the shadows of night obscured his vision.

The night, it seemed to him, had never before dragged so slowly. He did not close his eyes throughout the whole of it, but remained vigilant and anxious, his ear ready to catch the slightest sound.

At last the tedious hours passed; the dawn of another day crept over the landscape, the Indians were again stirring about the camp. At one end he now beheld a sight that chilled his blood, made every nerve tingle as with agony. The Indians were putting up a long stake, whittling sticks to a sharp point, procuring irons, thrusting them in the fire, and making other preparations for torture.

The torture of whom?

Long-shot hardly deemed it necessary to ask that question. His own heart told him that Mary and her father were the destined sufferers.

Near the tree in which Kit was concealed there was a small, open space of ground, and thither the stake which had been prepared was removed and planted, within twenty yards of Kit.

The young man closely examined the lock of his rifle, to make sure that it was in good order.

He had made up his mind to fire, spring upon the Indians, and die fighting for the girl he loved.

Thus reflecting, he continued watching the natives, who soon had the stake in its place, their eyes glaring with exultation, as if they were already anxious to commence their work.

Meanwhile Kit, keeping his eyes fixed upon the camp, finally beheld emerging from a lodge those for whom he had been watching—Mary and her father, in charge of an Indian guard.

Behind them walked Mark Wylde, at sight of whom Kit mechanically lifted his rifle, as if to lodge a bullet in the traitor's heart. This, however, he would not do. He must exert patience—watch and wait.

Poor Mary, by the side of her father, had one of his bound arms pressed to her bosom, while her face, pale with mingled grief, indignation, and terror, stirred the heart of Kit Swift almost to bursting.

Meanwhile the faces of the squaws, who followed in the train of the others, showed a mixture of contempt and envy which were singular to witness. The emotion of the white girl, so far from awakening sympathy in their bosoms, seemed to inspire them with a wish to torment her.

On came the party until, finally, they paused close to the stake.

Then Mark and the chief, withdrawing to one side, conversed in tones too low to reach the ears of the watcher in the tree.

The conference between Mark and the red chief lasted fully a quarter of an hour, then the latter made a sign to the Indians who, advancing, seized Ward and dragged him toward the stake, the ready thongs in their hands.

At this sight, Mary, uttering a piercing cry, threw herself with outstretched arms toward the chief, beseeching him to spare her father.

Not a muscle of the Indian's face moved; he listened to her until her father was secured to the stake, then turned toward her.

"My white brother"—pointing to Mark—"has spoken. If the White Bird be his squaw, well; if not—ugh! fader must die!"

"Yes," said Mark; "again I repeat what I before said: consent to be my wife, and your father's bonds shall be severed; refuse, and all the horrors of torture and fire are his!"

"No—no, gal! Hold out!" screamed Ward. "Don't yer show the white feather now, but let 'em see that Mary Ward hev as steady narves as any squaw among the red-skins!"

At these words of the trapper, many a contemptuous glance was turned upon the prisoner by the Indian maidens, especially by Wilola, the belle of her tribe. This girl, who had loved the stately Red Eagle—the son of O-wy-kee—with all the fervor of her warm nature, had seen, with a feeling of rage and bitterness difficult to describe, the eyes of the young man turn with admiration upon the white girl when she was led, a prisoner, into the camp. Subsequently her indignation was increased by overhearing the chief propose to his father to make the white girl his squaw.

She had wandered away from the camp, and in the very stream at the bottom of which the glazed eyes of her dead lover, unknown to her, were now turned upward in death, she had surveyed herself, wondering what could have turned the fancy of Red Eagle from her to a girl like Mary Ward.

Down in the clear stream, then, Wilola saw this beautiful reflection of herself, and, with bitter heart, wondered where the eyes of Red Eagle could be that he could not perceive her superiority to the red and white rose that had shrunk back, as from a blast, at the glance of her (Wilola's) scornful eye.

To the trapper's side the Indian maiden now stepped, and in her bell-like voice, which was loud and clear without being harsh, even when expressing scorn and anger, she said:

"Lynx-eye is wrong! The white girls are all cowards! They are lilies to be torn and trampled on by every blast from the thunder-cloud! But the red women love storm as sunshine, and never shrink! The white people cannot make them cowards—they are very brave!"

"I aren't nothin' to say to ye, gal. You are like all your sect, which are sart'inly *cata-mounties*, ef that are a credit to the feminine ginder. My darter is of another stamp, and it war," he added, in a lower voice, "to put her in a persition which are more suitable to her station

than the present, that I started on this onfortunate tramp."

From the speaker, Wilola, now advancing, peered contemptuously into the face of the young white girl.

"'Fraid to die! Coward! Ugh!"

"Willingly would I die, if you would spare my poor father!" cried Mary.

"Why not marry white man, then?" continued Wilola, pointing to Mark.

"Consent, and all will be right!" cried Mark.

It was a trying situation. Mary loved her father dearly, and her very spirit writhed with anguish at the thought of his fate. The fact that she might save him, even by the sacrifice of marrying a man whom she detested, took strong possession of her mind, and yet, at every glance she gave the wretch, her heart would revolt at the thought.

With what intense interest did Long-shot watch the parties from the tree! How he longed to put a bullet through the heart of the traitor Mark, for even daring to make such a proposition to the girl he so dearly loved!

Still he would not, for the world, have fired at this moment.

He had resolved to wait and see if the girl's love for him *was strong enough to stand this fearful test*—if she would, for *his* sake, refuse even to save her father by giving up her lover.

So there, with every nerve strung to the highest pitch of expectation, he remained, an eager listener, in the tree, reading each movement, every expression of Mary's face.

At present he was unable to determine whether the girl would consent or not, to the proposition made to her by Mark. She stood with clasped hands and eyes upraised to heaven, as if calling for aid from the powers above. Her agonized face and pleading eyes pierced Kit to the very heart; still he remained firm to his determination to watch and wait.

Thus several minutes passed, when the chief made a sign to one of the Indians provided with several sharp flints, and to another who held a pile of fagots.

The fagots were piled at the feet of the bound man; the Indian with the flints advanced to thrust them into the flesh of the trapper.

Here was the trying moment!

Kit held his rifle ready, while Mary sprang forward with a shriek, as the instruments of torture were about to be used.

"Hold! hold!" she cried in a voice that pierced Kit to the heart like a knife. "I WILL MARRY THAT MAN!"

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TRAIL.

FOR several moments Kit remained clinging to the branch like one with senses benumbed by a stroke of lightning. Thus affected, he scarcely noticed what was passing in the vicinity of the stake, so that Ward was cut down, and the whole party had moved away toward the interior of the camp before he recovered his powers of observation.

Then, with a groan, he raised himself, and leaning against the trunk of the tree, bowed his

face in his hands, now realizing the full force of the blow which had fallen upon him.

His Mary was torn from him forever! True, owing to her father's opposition, he had not hoped to win her for the present. Still, he had hoped that time would soften the trapper's heart, and that, eventually, he might have made her his bride.

With face still bowed, he, for a long time, thought strongly and earnestly. The idea of following the twain and *preventing* Mark from making the girl his wife, now took possession of him. The man had no right to the fulfillment of a promise wrung from the girl under such circumstances as described.

He would save her from the man she hated, and then he would fly, he cared not whither, never to see the girl again!

Carefully watching the camp, he saw Ward depart in one direction, while Mary and Mark rode off in another.

Cautiously stealing down the tree, he then followed the two latter. The direction they took led them off toward the stream in which was the dead body of the chief's son. They crossed it, however, below this spot, and rode in a north-west direction.

"They are probably going to Batesville," thought Kit; "that is the nearest settlement."

Then he bitterly regretted the loss of his horse, which would prevent him keeping up with the two.

With his trusty rifle, he might have put an end to Mark at once, but the young man could not bear the thought of striking even this detestable foe from an ambush.

No, he would confront him, face to face, tell him to defend himself, and they could fight as became men, hand to hand.

With this thought uppermost, he hurried on, but the riders were soon lost to his view in the distance. He had noticed the direction taken, however, so that he was certain the two were going to Batesville.

By walking night and day, he would reach the village before they could be married. They would probably pause on the journey at night, that Mary might rest which might even give Kit a chance to overtake them.

Keeping closely upon the trail, therefore, the young man made good speed.

Meanwhile, there was upon the trail another besides himself. This was Ward, the trapper, who, after walking a few miles from the Indian camp, had resolved to turn to follow up Mark and his daughter, and force the young girl from the hands of her rascally companion. Although a strictly honorable man, and always holding his word as sacred as his life, yet the trapper deemed that under such circumstances as had passed, it was no more than right for him to save his daughter from the fate of marrying a man who had forced the promise from her.

The spot occupied by the trapper was an opening in a forest glade to the eastward of the stream by which Long-shot had encountered the Red Eagle. All round him the shrubbery was too thick to be penetrated by the eye of man, and in order that his progress might be facilitated, he resolved to pass round the brushwood, where the woods were thinner.

He regretted that his horse had not been restored to him, as his trusty rifle had been, which he now carried slung to his back.

The chief, however, had informed him that it was never his custom to restore the horse of a person whom he had once captured. It was against the laws of the tribe.

"That are a very good law," Ward had answered, "fur you, and amazin'ly bad fur me, seein' as I hev a long journey to make on foot. Ef you will give me my horse, I will send you another one when I git my property, along with fire-water, too!"

The chief's eyes had sparkled, but he replied that he could not break the law.

"That law are why thar be so many horse-thieves among your infarnal tribe," the trapper had then remarked.

He was soon hurrying along, walking with a speed but little diminished by the trials and hardships he had recently undergone.

In the course of half an hour, he beheld a sight which was well calculated to rivet his attention; a horse lying dead in the shrubbery near the bank of a stream.

It did not take him long, when arrived near enough to the beast, to recognize the horse which he had often seen carry Long-shot.

The sight of the horse, therefore, sent a thrill of regret through his veins, as he imagined that some serious harm had befallen the owner.

"That's what comes of his follerin' me and my darter!" sighed the trapper. "I'm mighty sorry fur the lad—mighty sorry, although, arter all," he suddenly added, "it may be that no harm are come to him."

Thus cogitating, he glanced carefully around him, when he heard a slight rustling on the opposite bank of the stream, and glancing thither, caught the gleam of an Indian robe through the shrubbery. He retreated, crouching behind the dead horse, as the familiar face and form of Wilola, the belle of the Osage tribe, suddenly emerged to view.

There was a weird, anxious look in her soft black eyes, as they roved about the ground. The truth was, she had found the trail of her lover, whom, for many hours, she had missed from the camp, and was now looking for him.

The blush upon her round cheek, the gleam of the soft eyes, the compressed lips, the graceful attitude of the lithe figure, formed a charming picture, upon which Ward, notwithstanding the importance of the business he had in hand, could not but gaze with admiration. In fact, there was a resemblance in this child of the forest to the beautiful girl, whom, in years long past, he had sought after, to see her won away from him by Long-shot's father.

Hither and thither, anon peering through the shrubbery, then gazing up and down the stream, Wilola, slowly advancing, did not see the horse, partially screened by the thick, drooping branches of a number of young saplings.

Soon, however, as she drew nearer, her eye was caught by the sight of the dead horse.

A start, an exclamation, a wild look, at the marks of a struggle upon the grass, at a red feather, evidently torn from the plume of the beloved one, lying upon the ground.

Slowly, gently, the shadows of the trees were

swaying upon the surface of the clear stream, darkening the waters so that the terrible object beneath was not yet visible to the maiden's eye.

Motionless a moment, she soon started quickly forward, as if to take a yet closer survey of the grass upon the other side of the stream.

As she did so, however, her downward gaze, falling upon the clear waters in which those moccasin-prints were lost, was caught by the body of her lover, there under the surface, with his legs entangled in the grass. A moment she stood gazing wildly upon the horrible vision, her hand up on her heart, her lips half parted; then she uttered a piercing cry, that rung through the woods with startling distinctness, and turning from the spot, ran swiftly toward the camp.

Ward now emerged from his hiding-place, and peering into the stream, discovered the cause of the girl's emotion. He turned away from the spot with a half shudder, and continued his way, still following the trail of the two riders.

"Ef I ain't mistaken," he muttered, "it war Long-shot that sent the Injun to the bottom of that stream. Wonder whar he is *now*; p'r'aps no better off than the red-skin."

He hurried along without pausing, continuing his way with unerring precision by the marks of the horses' hoofs.

For many hours he moved on in the direction of Bate ville. At sundown he paused near a thick mass of shrubbery, and was taking a survey of the country, when he thought he heard a rustling in the bushes behind him. He turned quickly, when whiz went an arrow within an inch of his head!

Instead of taking flight, Ward dashed toward the spot whence he judged the arrow must have been discharged.

With a fierce yell, a tall, mounted Indian, of the Osage tribe, sprung from behind a clump of shrubbery, to hurl his tomahawk.

"Hold!" exclaimed Ward. "This are a mistake. I hev jist been freed from yer camp by that red devil O-wy-kee—yer chief!"

The only answer was the twang of the tomahawk, as it was thrown. The trapper, however, being on his guard, avoided the missile, then discharged his rifle at the Indian. The bullet struck the red-man in the side, inflicting a severe wound, which, rendering the fellow powerless to fight, sent him dashing off, speeding away like the wind.

Wondering what could have tempted the Indian to attack him, after the agreement with his chief, the trapper could only conclude that it was because he (the Indian), having been away from the camp at the time of the agreement, was ignorant that it had been made. Unable to understand English, probably, this was the reason why the trapper's words had produced no effect upon him.

Thus cogitating, the solitary trapper continued his way.

CHAPTER X.

THE RESCUE.

It was past midnight; the moon was up, there was not a cloud in the sky.

Mark had halted with his fair companion in a grove, the soft turf of which would afford her an excellent resting-place. He had spread a blanket and built a sort of shelter of boughs and twigs for her within about twenty yards of the spot where he intended to slumber away the few hours intervening between that time and morning.

The poor girl had not spoken to him, except to give a cold answer to his questions during the whole journey.

She would not now accept the preparations he had made for her comfort, but wandered away and seated herself upon a mossy bank near a small rivulet, lighted by the rays of the moon streaming down through an opening among the trees.

Thus seated, her heart was a prey to fearful anguish.

The image of Kit Swift kept rising before her mind, so that she almost fancied she could see him standing before her leaning upon his rifle and gazing reproachfully toward her.

"I am to marry that other man!" she muttered. "What would Kit say if he knew it?"

Then a singular expression came to her eyes.

"I will not be his wife long. Kit, oh Kit, if you were only here that I might bid you farewell!"

Sullenly watching her until dawn, Mark stood at a distance, when, feeling a hand upon his shoulder, he turned to behold Long-shot. The wretch grew ashy pale and sprung back, trembling in every limb, for a moment losing his usual self-possession.

The gray dawn was stealing upon the eastern sky; its light fell full upon the stern face of the young hunter.

"Come, Mark Wyld!" he said in a low, calm voice—"come with me and pay for your treason!"

"What do you mean? Why have you stolen upon me like a cat?"

"To take you from the prize that you covet, the girl who detests you; to wrest Mary Ward from your clutches!"

"You can never do that!" cried Mark in a hoarse voice.

He drew a pistol as he spoke, and taking aim at the young man, was about firing, when Long-shot knocking up his wrist, the bullet went whizzing over his head.

It was in the days before revolvers. Mark had no other barrel to fire. Kit sprung upon him, and the two closed in a desperate struggle, each drawing his knife.

In a few minutes, Long-shot had inflicted a wound in the other's arm, when, staggering toward his horse, which was tied to a sapling not far off, Mark threw himself upon his back.

He had broken his knife short off near the handle, and had therefore concluded to seek safety in flight. As he rode on, he made a grasp at the bridle of Mary's horse which was tied to a sapling.

A moment later he must have had the animal but for Kit, who, springing forward, caught the horse just in time to prevent its being taken off.

The runaway had left his pistol lying among the underbrush.

Kit picked it up, looked at it a moment, and, perceiving that the weapon was cracked from stock to muzzle, he threw it away.

His next plan was to search for Mary, whom he found leaning against a tree, whence she had been a spectator of the last scene of the combat.

She had fallen into a troubled slumber, from which she had been partially awakened by the report of the pistol.

The light of dawn, falling down through the branches of the trees, was sufficient to enable her to recognize the face of the young man.

"Kit, oh Kit!" she exclaimed, and staggered toward him.

He drew back, folding his arms and gazing coldly upon her.

"I have saved you from marrying that wretch!" he said. "I will now conduct you to your father, if I can find him."

Surprised by his strange behavior, the girl stood gazing upon him with pallid face and wild eyes.

"You *promised* to marry that man," he said; then went on to explain how he had overheard all from his position in the tree near the Indian camp.

"I had not *thought*," he continued, "that *any* circumstances could have made you give such a promise. I have seen I was mistaken; that your love for me—"

"Hold!" interrupted Mary; "be not too hasty to judge me."

"I heard you give the promise."

"I did it to save my father's life."

"Even that consideration should not have made you willing to give me up for another man. You intended to fulfill your promise?"

"Yes; I always keep my word."

"I shall not let you do so, this time."

"If you do not permit me, of course I cannot keep it," said Mary.

She did not seem at all displeased at the idea of being prevented by force from keeping her word. Her cheeks were covered with blushes, and her eyes were very bright.

There was a moment's pause, when, noticing the sad, downcast face of her lover, Mary laid her hand lightly upon his shoulder.

"Kit," she said, in a sweet, solemn voice, "do you suppose that any consideration in the world could have ever tempted me to *live*, as a wife, with any man but you?"

"You gave the promise," he answered, gloomily.

"Yes; and would have fulfilled it. But I had intended, the moment I should have been united to him, to flee from him, and put *an end to my life!*"

"Mary!"

"Yes, yes. I repeat, I could never live as wife with any man but you!"

Her eyes shone brightly upon him. Her face looked lovelier than ever. Involuntarily he threw an arm round her waist and kissed her respectfully upon the forehead.

Gently she disengaged herself.

"You said you would take me to my father."

"Yes, if I can find him. Will you forgive me for doubting you?"

"Willingly," she answered, "although I should have thought that, as well as you know

me, you would at once have guessed my intention when you heard me make that promise."

"It was stupid of me," he replied; "but I shall be careful, in future, not to form such hasty conclusions."

"And now," continued Mary, demurely, "I think if you want to prevent me from keeping my word, your best plan will be to take me as far as possible from Mark Wylde, who, I doubt not, can find men bad enough to pursue me and harm you. When we halted here, he said we were not six hours from Batesville."

"Were it not for Mark's being there," said Kit, "I would think my best way were to take you to your uncle's, that you might obtain rest and refreshment, while I went off to hunt for your father."

"No, no, do not take me to uncle's," said the girl, shuddering. "I am strong and well enough to go with you on the search for my father."

Accordingly they started; Kit mounting the girl upon the horse, while he walked by her side, holding the rein.

Meanwhile Mark Wylde continued on, dashing toward Batesville at full speed, intending when arrived there to persuade several lawless fellows with whom he was acquainted, to help him pursue Long-shot, and, wreaking vengeance on the young man, obtain the girl, Mary Ward.

His wounded arm pained him severely as he proceeded, and he muttered curses against the hunter with every twinge he felt.

At about nine o'clock he was within three miles of Batesville, when he met two horsemen—one of whom was none other Wilkins, Mary's uncle—riding to the southward.

"Hello, Mark! It seems to me you have returned soon. What's the matter with your arm?"

In a few words Mark explained the latter circumstance.

"So Mary was with you, eh? All right, then, I suppose?" he asked in a significant tone.

"Yes. Ward left the camp, and—"

"What? Ward alive? How is this? You have not carried out my instructions."

"Not exactly; still it will all amount to the same."

"How so? You have permitted Ward to go free."

Mark smiled. There was a peculiar expression in that smile.

"Come, speak out!" cried the other, impatiently.

"It was all done that I might get Mary Ward for my wife. Her father is to be followed and tomahawked *within a few miles of the camp!*"

"A fool's business! Ward has escaped from many a tight place. He may escape from this!"

"You are mistaken. He suspects nothing and will not be upon his guard."

Wilkins's companion—a tall, stout, broad-shouldered fellow with a low forehead and red hair—had been vainly endeavoring to hear what was said. The words, however, were spoken in such a low voice that he was unable to catch their import.

It may as well be at once stated that this fellow, whose name was Ben Jookes, was Wilkins's tool—his right-hand man, in all his little schemes

of deception, etc., practiced upon the poor trappers.

Men of that stamp usually despise those who are frank and honest; for which reason Jookes had always held Ward in great contempt.

This had merged into a feeling of positive hatred, when the trapper, one day, detecting him in a piece of fraud, proclaimed the cheat to all of his friends, much to the detriment of Jookes, who, thereby, was ever after unable to earn half the amount he had previously done.

Knowing the man's feelings regarding Ward, Wilkins now drew him aside and spoke to him for some time in a low voice, endeavoring to persuade him to hunt for, waylay and shoot Ward.

Such acts, in those days, were not uncommon on the frontier.

"If he escapes the Indians, I am sure he will not escape you!" continued Wilkins.

In fact, Jookes had the reputation of being as skillful as a bloodhound in following up a trail; and as Ward would have no suspicion of the man's intention, the latter might easily accomplish his work.

Bad as he was, however, Jookes hesitated long before giving his consent, which, in fact, was only won at last by the promise of a magnificent reward, to be paid whether the Indians should or should not have slaughtered Ward before he (Jookes) reached him.

This matter having been settled, the two men separated from Mark, who moved on toward the town.

CHAPTER XI.

FREEDOM.

DOWN in the cellar, Gnarl, chained like a criminal, remained, a victim to the most harassing thoughts.

The two days fixed for the torture of Ward had already passed, so that he doubted not that the remains of the poor fellow were already lying, scorched and blackened upon some desolate plain.

Then, too, the pretty Mary Ward! She by this time was probably the slave of the chief's son, Red Eagle.

The soft eyes of the girl had made a powerful impression upon the dwarf.

"If I were only free," he had muttered, more than once, folding his arms and knitting his brows, "I should be delighted to rescue that girl and make her my wife."

Although, as already shown, the self-conceit of this little fellow was very great, still, from its very ridiculousness, there was about it nothing offensive.

"Yes," he continued, "would that I were free when, like one of the knights of old, I would save my lady-love, and—"

"Haw! haw! haw! He! he! he!"

The dwarf glanced in the direction of the sound, to see the gleam of a pair of eyes flashing like coals of fire through the gloom.

The next moment the outlines of Sarah's form became visible, as she drew nearer.

"You have come here to taunt me!" exclaimed Gnarl—"to laugh at the woes of a prisoner, who, if free, would make you tremble!"

"Haw! haw! haw!"

Gnarl looked at the negress in contempt.

"I hab not come fur to taunt you, honey, nor to do no sich a thing. I hab jist come to show you dat dis nigga am not lost to de woes ob symphony."

"What mean you?"

"Well, den, I am come to free you from de bondage ob oppression!"

"To free me! That is good news indeed. But by so doing, do you not render yourself a victim to the wrath of—"

"Do wroth ob dat Wilkins!" cried Sarah, elevating her arm. "I call Hebben to witness dat I shoke myself clear ob dat man, from dis moment. I hab made up my mind to run away. He strike me twice more ob late, strike me hard on de head wid poker. Now he am gone to wil-lage, somewhar, to see 'bout trapper-skins, and not come back until to-morrow morning; so I'm goin' to leave dis house and trabble."

"You cannot travel without money."

The face of the negress was convulsed by a broad grin. She looked at the dwarf cunningly.

"Oh, I get along," she said.

With these words she pulled from her pocket a key, with which she unlocked the ball and chain around the ankles of the prisoner.

"Free! free!" exclaimed Gnarl jumping up about three feet. "But, alas! I fear my friends by this time, have met their fate."

He seemed to reflect a moment, then added:

"I may not be too late, after all, to save Mary Ward, who perhaps even now is a prisoner among the red-skins. I will go to Fort Brown, at all events, and rouse the garrison. Now, then, is there a horse about these premises?"

The negress answered in the negative; so Gnarl resolved to make the journey on foot.

Before he left the house, however, Sarah crammed his haversack with provisions.

"Thank you," said Gnarl; "you have proved yourself a friend to me, and if ever I am able I shall reward you."

"Nigger want no reward," answered Sarah, "cept to lib wid some massa dat no whip, and gib plenty to eat."

"Had I been freed in time to save Ward, and see him in possession of his New Orleans property, such a home might have been afforded you."

The dwarf then gave the old woman's hand a hearty shake, and wishing her good luck, departed in the direction of Fort Brown.

It was dawn—the same morning as that of the meeting between Mark Wylde and Wilkins, whose horse's tracks the dwarf could distinctly trace upon the path he was pursuing.

Hurrying along, he had, by noon, proceeded many miles, when he paused to partake of the contents of his haversack.

Seated upon the ground, with his "knotty" limbs crossed, his huge head bowed as he munched the provision, Gnarl presented a singular picture. The spot he occupied was an opening between clumps of shrubbery, in a grove of trees, about three miles from the spot at which Long-shot had met with Mary, after rescuing her from the clutches of Mark Wylde.

The dwarf had nearly finished his meal, when he fancied he heard a rustling in the shrubbery.

He lifted his head, and cautiously rising, drew his knife—the only weapon now in his possession.

Glancing round him, he soon observed a portion of the person whom he had heard; a horseman, who, having turned his head, had his back toward the spectators.

The head and shoulders only of the horseman were visible, the shrubbery concealing the rest of his form. The hair, hanging in rough locks of red, and the broad shoulders, had a familiar look.

"Ward! Ward! Thank God you are safe and have escaped!" exclaimed the dwarf. "Behold! I, too, am here!"

At these words the horseman turned quickly, when Gnarl discovered that he had made a singular mistake, for the man, whose head with its red hair and whose broad shoulders had so closely resembled those of Ward, was none other than Ben Jookes!

"Ha! you rascal! Who are you, and what are you doing here?" exclaimed Jookes, riding toward him, a drawn pistol in his hand.

"And what right have you, sir, to ask that question?" inquired Gnarl, folding his arms and drawing himself up proudly.

The dignified attitude and manner of this odd little fellow amused Jookes, who at once burst out laughing coarsely.

At this the dwarf, with a gesture of contempt, turned to pursue his way, when the horseman, stooping down, caught him roughly by the shoulder.

"See hyar, you fellow; you spoke the name of Ward jist now. It war an insult iur you to mistake me fur that chap. However, I'll let that go. Hev you seen Ward?"

"No."

"Are you acquainted with him?"

"It is none of your business. Have you seen Ward?"

"Thar! you little rascal! take that fur your impertinence!" cried Jookes, dealing Gnarl a kick that sent him to the ground. As the dwarf fell, however, he caught the leg of the other, jerking it with such force that the man was pulled from his horse.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Gnarl. "Now, then, I'll show you a trick! You will find your horse waiting for you at Fort Brown!"

So saying, he vaulted upon the back of the steed, and before the owner could rise and make use of his pistol, he was dashing off with the speed of the wind.

He had come in sight of the fort, an hour later, and was dashing on at the same break-neck speed as before, when up from a clump of shrubbery sprung a couple of Indians, taking aim at him with their rifles.

The crack of the pieces sounded upon the air, but Gnarl had caused his horse to shy to one side, thus fortunately escaping both bullets, which, however, went whizzing in dangerous proximity to his head.

With a wild cheer, he dashed on, and a quarter of an hour later found himself within the fort, the gate of which had been opened for him

by the sergeant of the guard, who inferred that he was pursued by enemies.

His story was soon told. The captain mustered his men, eighty in all, and selecting half, placed them under command of a lieutenant, ordering them to be ready for marching at a moment's notice.

An hour later, with Gnarl for a guide, they started on foot, the dwarf having left the horse he had ridden, at the fort, to be delivered to the owner, when he should call for it.

That same day, Wilkins, on his return to Batesville, passed within a mile of the marching party without either seeing the other.

As Wilkins drew near his house, he noticed that the front door was open, a circumstance which surprised him very much.

Reaching the house, he was surprised at not seeing Sarah, and still more so when, after searching it thoroughly, he discovered that not only had the negress gone, but the prisoner also. At this he raved like a madman; raved still more when he discovered a secret drawer in his bureau forced open and three thousand dollars missing!

"The wretch! the horrible old hag! She has stolen my money! I will pursue her to the ends of the earth but I will find her!"

He partook of a hasty meal, and mounting his horse, rode at once in search of the negress. The marks of her great hob-nailed shoes were upon the soft ground for miles, winding along into a dense forest, away toward the south, in the same direction as that which Mary Ward and Guy had taken to search for the former's father.

All day long Wilkins moved hither and thither, searching vainly for Sarah. At midnight he threw himself down and fell into a restless slumber, from which he waked at dawn, to see a tall Indian standing near him, motionless, leaning upon his rifle.

It was O-wy-kee, the chief of the Osages!

"My white brother has slept well," said the chief, in low, solemn tones.

"Yes. What are you doing so far away from your camp?" cried Wilkins, rising.

"The sky is red in O-wy-kee's eyes! The air red too! He is abroad on the death-hunt! He is looking for Long-shot!"

Glancing at the chief's girdle, Wilkins noticed a fresh scalp.

"See! O-wy-kee has done his white brother's bidding! Lynx-eye is no more!"

"So you have slain him with your own hand," said Wilkins.

"No. One of O-wy-kee's band brought him this scalp, just as the sun came up."

As he spoke, the Indian raised the object, which was a disagreeable sight with the locks of red hair hanging from it.

"It is well, chief," said Wilkins. "Your heart should be glad now that your great enemy is no more."

"A thousand of O-wy-kee's foes would not count one for Red Eagle!"

"What do you mean, chief?"

"Red Eagle sleeps," answered O-wy-kee, without the slightest emotion. "Long-shot's bullet was straight—ugh!"

"What! your son dead?"

"Yes."

"I hope you may find Long-shot and get his scalp, too!" said Wilkins, who, for more reasons than one, hated the young man.

The latter had once confronted him and threatened to compel him to leave Batesville if he did not deal more honestly with the trappers.

"Yes; O-wy-kee's warriors are on the trail of the young hunter. He will be taken, and the girl with him—the White Swan! She shall die too!"

"She is my niece, chief."

"She shall die! She has broken the heart of Wilola! She stole the Red Eagle's love—her lover stole his life!"

"Well, I suppose you will have your way, chief," said Wilkins.

Nevertheless, although there was now a prospect of getting rid of all those who could interfere between himself and the New Orleans property, he felt a twinge of conscience at the thought of his niece falling beneath the tomahawk.

"What else can I do?" he muttered, thus endeavoring to stifle that inward voice. "Red Eagle would have his way."

As the chief, turning, departed, he kept his eye upon the scalp, until he could no longer see it.

"The great Lynx-eye is gone! So perish all my enemies!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEARCH.

FOR nearly two days Mary and her lover searched for Ward. Then the young girl began to look serious.

"He would have followed after me; I know that well," she said. "In fact, I had anticipated his interfering to prevent my marrying Mark Wylde."

Kit also thought it very natural that, after leaving the Indian camp, Ward should follow the tracks of his daughter, and was, therefore, surprised that as yet he had seen no sign of him.

In spite of all his efforts to hide the betrayal of his fears that some misfortune had befallen Ward, he was unable to do so.

Mary, watching his countenance sharply, at once read the fears traced therein.

"It is useless, Kit," she murmured, suddenly, a feverish flush upon her cheeks. "You share my apprehensions?"

"It is singular, I must own," he answered, "that we have seen nothing of your father. Still, it is possible that we may have missed him. In this wild country, friends can never be sure of meeting, not even, sometimes, when following the same trail."

Mary, however, dared not hope. A strange uneasiness lay like a heavy weight upon her heart.

The search for the trapper was continued until noon, when the two paused to rest, and partake of the refreshment which Kit carried in his haversack. He had recently shot several wild geese and cooked some of them to a palatable tenderness.

After the meal, the two continued on to the southward. They had not proceeded far, however, when Kit suddenly paused, as he caught

the gleam of a bright robe through the shrubbery.

An instant later, a wild, plaintive, yet musical voice was heard, ringing through the woods, followed by the rapid rustling of approaching footsteps.

Kit was about drawing back, but ere he could do so, there sprung forth with a bound from the shrubbery, a beautiful Indian girl—none other than Wilola, who, it was now plain, had been crazed by the discovery of her lover's dead body under the stream.

Of highly sensitive nature, Wilola, who was not of purely Indian stock, her mother having been a half-breed between Osage and French, had been unable to bear the shock of that sudden terrible discovery.

Red Eagle had been every thing to her—all that her girlish fancy had ever painted of the heroic and sublime. She had cherished for him a tenderness amounting almost to infatuation. One who had previously seen her must now be shocked by the pitiful change in her appearance.

Her long hair hung in half-tangled masses below her waist, her eyes and cheeks were sunken, there were threads of gray already visible among her sable locks.

On seeing the two travelers, she paused, glaring upon them a moment—then, tossing her arms to and fro, she broke forth into a wild Indian chant, the words of which neither Mary nor her companion could understand.

Gradually, as if her bewildered brain half comprehended that her auditors could not understand her, she changed her speech into the broken English in which it had been her habit to converse with the whites.

"The Eagle is under the water! No more he to mountain-top fly! Ho! ho! ho! Good-by to the great Eagle, for his plume is wet!"

"I will go down and loose his claw from the reeds! Perhaps he come down from spirit-land and take me up! Ah! white man—white girl—the Eagle is gone!"

Much more she said, which it is not necessary to repeat. In the midst of her wild talk, however, Kit, chancing to glance to the left, beheld half a dozen dusky Indian warriors standing, apparently, with every mark of the loftiest respect, watching the demented girl of their tribe!

It was evident that, although they had seen the whites, the presence of the raving girl prevented their firing upon them.

Kit, however, judged that there were more not far off, that a party had stolen into the shrubbery behind him and was preparing to pounce upon him from that direction. He was led to this belief by the look of grim satisfaction strangely mingled with the expression of awe and respect, upon the faces of the savages, as well as by his knowledge of their cunning.

Determined not to be outwitted by them, the young man, holding his rifle for use at any moment, glided round to the other side of the Indian girl, drawing Mar after him.

He had scarcely done so, when he discovered that his surmise regarding a party stealing upon him was correct. There was a rustling in the shrubbery, and three Indians suddenly made their appearance, to perceive that Long-shot

had baffled them, for, as the Indian girl followed the whites, her red brethren dared not fire for fear of hitting her.

In fact, it was Kit's policy to keep her between himself and his enemies, while he retreated to some favorable spot for defense.

Unconscious of hindering her friends, the crazed girl continued following the two, making frantic gesticulations, and uttering such plaintive cries as, in spite of the peril of her situation brought tears to the eyes of soft-hearted Mary Ward.

Meanwhile Kit now and then glanced behind him to discover the nature of the ground toward which he was retreating. It was an extensive wooded swamp, in the center of which was a sort of oasis or green strip of land, plenty large enough to contain half a dozen people.

Kit at once concluded that he could reach this spot, by means of the protruding clumps of dry earth in the swamp, and could thence make a tolerable defense, as the Indians, in order to reach him, could not advance more than two abreast, the clumps of earth extending in a single chain to the spot he intended to occupy. On no side of the swamp except this could a footing be obtained.

The progress of the young man was facilitated by an examination of the place he had made while following upon the trail of Mark Wylde. Passing this spot, it had then struck him that it would be an excellent place of defense in case of attack from a large party of Indians, and as the thorough hunter and trapper of the West always carries a map of the most available spots in his mind, he had not forgotten it, and would have found it even had not chance thrown him in the vicinity.

Now, however, several of the Indians, seeming to guess his intention, left the main body, and started as if to intercept him.

The young man soon compelled them to beat a retreat by lifting his rifle and taking aim at the foremost.

Thus he had the advantage of them; not one of the red-skins daring to fire upon him, owing to the close vicinity of Wilola, whom they were liable to hit. In a few minutes Kit had reached the chain of earth-clumps, where, catching Mary in his arms, he proceeded to cross.

Turning his head now and then, he was pleased to discover that the Indian girl continued to follow him, thus forming an effective shield between him and his enemies. So great was the respect in which the latter held the crazed girl, that not one of them would attempt to check her or turn her aside, even from a course which interfered with their designs.

Keeping on, Kit finally reached the swamp island. The Indian girl had paused when halfway there and stood motionless, still giving utterance to her melancholy cries.

"Oh, Kit, what will become of us? See! they are crowding to the edge of the swamp. I can no longer doubt my poor father's fate now! Those treacherous Indians have waylaid and murdered him, in spite of their agreement!"

Kit could, upon this subject, give no consolation. He thought it very probable that what Mary said might be true, and did not wish to awaken false hopes.

"See!" continued Mary, after a moment's silence, "the Indians seem determined to shoot us. They are walking along the edge of the swamp, doubtless so as to get out of the range of Wilola."

"You are right, Mary; but we can easily baffle them, as there are large trees here behind which we can screen ourselves."

He drew Mary behind a tree, just in time. There was the crack of several rifles, the bullets of which passed in dangerous proximity to the heads of the two whites.

The report of the rifles seemed to startle Wilola, who, clapping a hand to her ears, at once made off along the earth-clumps, and finally disappeared in the woods.

The Indians now held a brief consultation, and finally withdrew out of sight of the two whites. Mary looked at her lover in surprise.

"It is only a ruse," said he. "They probably intend to watch until dark before they steal upon us."

"God help us!" exclaimed Mary; "and oh, I wish I could find out what has become of my father."

As she spoke, Mary suddenly started, nervously grasping her companion's arm.

"Hark! did you not hear it?"

"What?"

"A noise as of some person sneezing close to us."

"Are you sure? I heard nothing."

"I am sure I heard it."

Kit listened, glancing, meanwhile, around him in all directions; but he could neither hear nor see anything except the shrubbery, the trees, and the noise made among them by the wind.

"It was the wind you heard," he said.

"Perhaps so. Still, I am not altogether certain on that point."

Hour after hour passed; at length the shadows of night began to gather.

"Now, then," said Kit, as he made a seat for Mary beneath a tree, "sit here while I keep good watch."

"Are you sure you could see any person who was approaching us?"

"Yes. Nobody could come over these slumps of earth without my seeing them."

Just as he spoke, there was a loud rustling in the branches over Mary's head, followed by a sneeze!

"You heard it this time?" cried Mary.

"I did. Who is there?"—pointing his rifle toward the branches.

No response.

"Who is there? Speak, or I fire!"

"Ah, bless your soul! Massa Long-shot? It ain't only me!"

And the eyeballs of a human face were seen, gleaming like coals through the darkness.

"Who is 'me'?"

"Sarah! Don't you remember? Masta Wilkins's sarbent!"

"Why!" exclaimed Mary, in surprise, "it is my uncle's servant!"

"His sarbent no longer!" answered Sarah, as she swung herself by a branch to the foot of the tree.

Kit, who had seen her, on many occasions, in the village, and who had once befriended her by

giving her something to eat, when she came to him saying that Wilkins had made her go without her supper, was surprised at finding the woman here.

"How long have you been in that tree?" he inquired.

"About one hour before you come here."

"What were you doing there?"

"Massa treat me berry bad. Whip, strike poor nigger all de time; so, at las' she run away! Nebber go back again! Come here, and hide in tree, so dat massa can nebber find me."

"Cruel uncle!" exclaimed Mary. "I have often heard it reported that he beat you, but I could not believe it."

"Big scar dere!" said Sarah, pointing to the mark on her face, which, however, could hardly be seen in the darkness; "nebbber hab chance to gib more."

A moment the old negress paused; then, suddenly, she seemed to go off into hysterics. She tore her hair, she stamped the ground with her foot, she wept and moaned as if her heart would break.

"What is the meaning of this?" queried Kit.

"Ah, bress your heart! It gib me sich pain to bring bad news to Miss Mary!"

"Bad news! For Heaven's sake, what is it?"

"It am all about Miss Mary's fadder—ah, poor man!"

"Why did you not come down from the tree, if you knew anything about him, and tell us before?"

"Afraid. Massa Wilkins am a-lookin' fur me. Afraid he hide somewhar among de trees and see me."

"Well—the news! the news! what is it?"

"Arter running away from dat bad house whar I hab been so long, I make fur de woods. While dar, yesterday, a-crouchin' in de shrumbum, who should come along but Massa Wilkins, a-lookin' fur me. He stop close to whar I war, and he war a-goin' on 'bout me, when dar come along one ob his friends—a big Indian whom he called chief, wid de horriddest objeck at his girdle dat I e'ber sot dese blessed eyes on. It war a scalp, and dat scalp—oh, Miss Mary! it make my heart ache to tell you—dat scalp war de scalp ob your fadder, Ward, or Lynx-eye, as dey call him."

"How do you know this?" inquired Kit, sternly. "Mary, Mary, wait until you have proof, dear child, before you grieve. How did you know it was Ward's?"

"Ah, bress you! I would have known red ha'r anywhar! Besides, de chief himself said dat war de ha'r of dis Ward, whose scalp been take by anudder Injun!"

At this news, Mary, uttering a shriek, fell senseless into the arms of her lover.

There was a crash of rifles at the same moment, and a number of bullets whizzed round the heads of the little party!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEARCH.

WILKINS, when the chief had left him, vainly continued for a whole day his search for Sarah. On the next he returned to Batesville and had

placards for the apprehension of the negress posted in various parts of the town.

Next morning, hearing a knock at his door, he opened it to confront Mark Wylde.

"My intended bride is dead!" said the latter.

"Dead!" exclaimed Wilkins, astonished.

"Yes. Hunting for Long-shot and Mary, I came across a party of Osages, who, recognizing me, informed me that both were dead. The Indians shot them while they were on a spot of land in the middle of a swamp. It seems they could not get at them for a day and a half on account of the place being accessible only by one chain of earth-clumps, so that the fugitive hunter could have brought down any man who should attempt to cross. However, they kept peppering away at the two until they finally shot them—saw them both fall dead."

"Have they the scalps?"

"No; a storm flooded the swamp, so that they could not cross it."

"One thing I am sorry for," said Wilkins.

"And that?"

"Gnarl has escaped, and will report that I confined him."

"You can say you thought the little fellow was a traitor, trying to get the great Lynx-eye in the clutches of his foes."

"Yes, that is a capital idea."

"Now, then," said Mark, "I want my reward."

"You will have to wait."

"You have plenty."

"I have not; I have lately been robbed by that accursed negress."

"What! Sarah?"

"Yes. She it was who freed Gnarl."

"That reminds me that I thought I saw a black female face, a few days' journey back in the woods."

"Why didn't you pursue and overtake her? You would have done me a great service."

"I was not sure it was she. I saw her through some shrubbery two or three hundred yards off just for an instant—so briefly, in fact, that I believed my imagination had deceived me."

To explain the presence in the woods of Sarah, who was last noticed in the middle of the swamp, will require but a few words.

As the Indians had informed Mark Wylde, they had, after firing for some time at the twain upon the swamp island, seen them fall, side by side. Being unable to reach them in the then state of the swamp the Indians had quitted it, after hovering round it for a few hours, resolved to return for the scalps when the water flooding the swamp should have dried away; for, while sufficient to prevent their progress on foot, the water was not deep enough to float a canoe, which would have stuck fast in the soft mire.

The moment she saw her friends fall, Sarah, who all the time had remained behind the tree, after making herself known to Mary and Kit, endeavored to wade through the mire to dry land. Vain the attempt. She must sink over her head in the soft mud should she persevere.

In the midst of the mire, she contrived to clutch the branch of a cypress, to which she clung firmly. The Indians, who had noticed her go down in the long grass at that part of the

swamp, not being able to see her head from where they were stationed, concluded, before they withdrew, that she had sunk. Sarah, however, clung firmly to the branch, and finally, by a powerful effort, succeeded in drawing herself out. Before dawn she had reached dry land, when away she went, plunging into the forest, to be seen, as mentioned, on the following day by Mark Wylde returning to Batesville.

The next morning Wilkins commenced making preparations to set out for New Orleans.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARRESTED.

It was a bright morning next day when Wilkins again received Mark Wylde at his house.

The former was now fully equipped for his journey to New Orleans.

He had appointed Mark guardian of his estate while he should remain absent. Mark's own house was in the care of an old uncle and aunt, who, to pay for their living with him, the mean-spirited young man kept working like dogs.

Wilkins was about leaving, when Mark caught him by the sleeve.

"Hold! You must not go now!"

"Why?"

"Your life would be in danger."

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you. On my way here, I passed a group of men, standing near the corner of old Watts's store, and conversing together in low tones. When they saw me they stopped talking, and I am certain I heard them mention your name and say something about 'lynching'."

Wilkins turned pale and trembled. He had for a long time feared something of this kind, as he had been several times warned by badly-spelled anonymous notes to leave the place.

"I advise you to be on your guard, and to leave the house secretly at night," continued Mark.

"Yes, I will do so. Do you think they will come here?"

"I don't know. At all events, I anticipate nothing of that sort for a day or two. If I see them coming, I can step out of the back way and make my escape."

"Leaving my house to their mercy?"

"They will not molest your house. Why should they?"

"They will do anything. On my way, I think I had better stop at the fort and endeavor to persuade the commanding officer to send a guard for the protection of my property."

The day passed and the night-shadows gathered without any sign of the anticipated mob.

"I will now go," said Wilkins. "Good-by."

"Will you stop at the fort?"

"Yes. I am, as you know, a little acquainted with one of the captains, and will, therefore, endeavor to have a detail sent to my premises."

"Very well."

The next moment, mounting his horse, Wilkins dashed off.

The instant he was gone, Mark felt, creeping over him, an indescribable sensation of fear. The apartment in which he was seated was large, with a dingy ceiling and great carved oaken chairs and tables for furniture, giving a peculiarly gloomy aspect to the place. Mean-

while the wind, rising without, was now sighing through the branches of the trees round the house, making the sashes rattle, rumbling down the chimney, and, in fact, sending unearthly moans through the whole building. Presently the moon came up, shedding its light through the gloom without, and giving a sort of spectral aspect to the landscape.

Mark rose, and going to the front window, commanding a view of the road leading to the village, he thought he could make out the outlines of many figures stealing along through the shadows toward the house.

At this sight his heart beat fast, and he could scarcely catch his breath. He was soon satisfied that the forms of men *were* stealing toward the building!

Rushing down into the hall, he bolted the front door securely; then, turning, made his way through the back door, intending thus to effect his escape.

Before he could descend the stairs of the back stoop, however, he beheld *other forms* stealing along from that direction.

The truth instantly came to him! The trappers, to make sure of their intended victim, had actually surrounded the house.

Trembling from head to foot, Mark stood undecided what to do. Just then there was a heavy rap at the door—another—then another!

"Thunder!" exclaimed a rough voice; "you had better open or thar'll be mischief hyar!"

"Who are you and what do you want?" Mark now ventured to inquire.

"Who is it that speaks?—Mark Wylde, ef I ain't mistook!"

"Yes."

"Well, Mark Wylde, you're bad as him that employs yer, and we'll pay off old scores with yer!"

"I have never harmed you!"

"Yes, you hev! You helped cheat us out of our dues. You'd better open this hyar door! We're goin' to give both you and that other infarnal catamount, Wilkins, what you deserve."

"Wilkins is not here!" gasped the trembling wretch.

"Yer lie!"—followed by a tremendous crack at the door. "Ef yer don't open, we'll open fur ye!"

White and trembling, Mark now flew down into the cellar, as the safest place of refuge in the house. From here he might get a chance to make his exit, during a moment when the trappers were not in a position to intercept him.

The crashing at the door continued. Soon the trembling fugitive heard it give way, followed by the rushing sound of many men pouring into the hall.

"Whar is he?" "The rascally old hoss!" "The miserable old poke!" "We'll hev satisfaction!" "We'll t'ar out the heart of the old skunk!" and other equally expressive exclamations now rung through the house.

The noises grew louder, as the trappers vainly searched the house for Wilkins. The crashing of glass, as mirrors and window-panes were smashed, mingled with that of the furniture being violently broken, etc., etc., was now heard, with the hoarser din of voices, uttering terrible imprecations.

Having searched the upper parts of the house, the trappers now were heard approaching the cellar.

Mark crept toward the barred window, and peering cautiously forth, saw no person, when he concluded that the men had deserted the back premises and gone round to the front of the house.

Cautiously creeping toward the door, he pulled from his pocket the bunch of keys which, as guardian of the house, he carried with him, and soon found the one that fitted the lock.

Carefully opening the door, he peered out, but quickly drew back, for, right in front of him, leaning on their long rifles, their rough faces, beards, and shaggy hunting-shirts revealed in the light of the moon, stood a large group of the trappers, evidently keeping guard. Mark locked the door again, and creeping to the darkest corner of the cellar, crouched behind a barrel. This, however, it soon struck him, was an insecure hiding-place, as the men would be apt to look here for him, the moment they saw the barrel. Therefore he concluded to climb a number of wooden beams jutting from this side of the cellar, and lying his full length upon the topmost one, which was close to the ceiling, endeavor thus to escape his pursuers.

He had barely time to execute his plan, when down the steps of the cellar came the band, soon pouring into the apartment, provided with lights.

A fierce-looking set they were, armed to the teeth with rifles, hunting-knives and pistols. The lights flashing upon their faces, inflamed with mingled rum and anger, gave to them a ferocious expression, which might have excited the fears of a stouter heart than Mark Wylde's.

Lying at full length upon the protruding beam, scarcely daring to breathe, the young man trembled so violently that he was afraid the hunters would hear the creaking of the woodwork. This beam being in shadow, owing to another protruding downward from the top of the cellar, right in front of it, the light did not show the person of Mark Wylde.

The barrel, however, was kicked over, and a basket of wine in one corner was made use of. The trappers sat down, and drinking their fill, were soon almost crazy with the effects of the liquor!

Blaspheming horribly, they began dancing and capering about in a grotesque manner.

There was the tall, dark-browed Mississippian, the tiger-looking native of Louisiana, the gigantic Kentuckian, the Mexican, and even the Spaniard, all blending together in wild revel.

"Ef we can't roast his ribs we'll roast his boards! Ho! ho!" cried one.

"Yeh! yeh!" screamed the Louisiana man, showing his teeth, and tossing back from his brow the red Fez cap he wore, "we'll make a bonfire of the house! Heh-yah! heh-yah! hoo! hoo-oo!"

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE FORT.

WILKINS rode swiftly forward through the darkness. Well acquainted with the country, he had no need to pause to study his course.

When the moon came up he was five miles upon the way.

Before midnight he reached the fort.

"Who goes there?" from the sentry.

"A friend."

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

"I have it not. Call the corporal of the guard. I want to see Captain Freeman."

"He is not here."

"Not here?"

"No."

"Where is he?"

"I am not at liberty to tell. Corporal of the guard, number one!" he added, screaming out his words distinctly.

A clattering of advancing footsteps was heard, and the corporal came.

"Who are you?" he inquired, holding up his lantern to the horseman's face.

"My name is Wilkins."

"From Batesville?"

"Yes."

"Then you are under arrest! Take him into the fort," he added, turning to the two men who accompanied him.

Wilkins was led into the fort, and straight to the guard-house.

Vainly he endeavored to ascertain the cause of his arrest; no person would satisfy him. He was informed that he would know in good time.

The guard-house was a comfortless abode—a small stone house with barred windows and a dirty floor, upon which were stretched several military offenders, one of whom had a ball and chain attached to his leg.

This reminded Wilkins of Gnarl, when, like a flash came the thought that to this person he owed his arrest. Yes, Gnarl had doubtless told of his confinement in the cellar, and many other matters. Sarah had perhaps stated to him her suspicions that her master was a traitor; that he had, on several occasions—this was no more than true—forwarded information to the Indians regarding trains which would pass their way, and thus enabling them to attack the same with advantage, he afterward reaping a portion of the gains so dishonorably acquired. As this thought occurred to him, Wilkins uneasily thrust his hand into his pocket, taking therefrom a leather wallet, which, with other things, he had found scattered about the floor near the bureau, after Sarah's disappearance from the house.

He had not hitherto thought to open that wallet, which had contained papers of a private—a very private nature.

Among those papers was one—a note which Wilkins had once written to his traitorous employee, Ben Jookes, charging him to proceed at once to White Creek, where he would find a certain half-breed, who would communicate to the Osages the direction which a certain train, loaded with valuable goods, would take on leaving Batesville, and indicating the point which the savages would find most favorable for the attack.

Upon the back of this note Jookes had written out a receipt for a certain amount—the money afterward paid to him by Wilkins for his share of the job—which accounted for the paper's be-

ing returned to the employer. As it was sent by letter, and Jookes then departed for Mexico, another receipt could not be obtained; and so Wilkins, who always made it a point to preserve his receipts, had preserved this paper, taking the precaution to scratch out the writing on the other side.

Still, although he had done this, the letters might, he feared, be made out, if the paper were held up before the eyes.

"I say he *feared* this, because, on now examining the wallet, he discovered *that the paper was gone!*"

Yes, Sarah, evidently thinking that the papers in the wallet were of value, had extracted them all!

"If the finding of that paper is the cause of my arrest," exclaimed the prisoner, despairingly, "it is all over with me! Still, I have hope that the papers have not been found."

The more he thought upon the matter, however, the more uneasy he became.

There was no sleep for him that night.

Early in the morning, the officer of the guard appeared before him, leading a black woman.

This was Sarah!

At sight of the old hag, nothing could have been more fearful than the contrast between the whitely-blanché face of the prisoner and the sable blackness of the woman.

"Yaw! yaw! massa! Me got awful hungry, and so come to dis fort yesterdum, to get sunthin' to eat! *Tole all about you, too!*"

"You miserable old hag! What could you tell about me?"

"She has told us enough to warrant us in arresting you," said the officer of the guard.

"They have seen the paper!" was the thought that now flashed through the prisoner's mind. The next moment, however, he breathed a sigh of relief as the officer continued:

"She says you are on friendly terms with the Indians, and that you have plotted to have this fort attacked and captured."

"No such thing! It is false! What! would you believe that black imp before me?—that imp who stole my money from my bureau before she ran away?"

"No matter! It do me no good! It am all los'. I drop it out of my pocket in de swamp. It war in a black bag!" answered the simple-minded woman—"lose it in de woods."

"Ah! so she is a thief!" exclaimed the officer. "Upon my word, she is a pretty person to criminate another!"

"It am all true, what I say!" cried the negress, "eben do' I am a t'ief, aldo' in rallity dat money I done took been nuffin' more dan my lawful wages!"

"Captain Freeman, with whom I am acquainted, will testify to my good character," said Wilkins, "so I hope you will permit me to continue on my way unmolested."

The officer of the guard now consulted with the colonel about the matter. The colonel visited Wilkins.

"Although it seems very probable you have been slandered," said he, "how happened it that you captured that little dwarf, Gnarl, and put him in confinement?"

"I mistook him for a spy. I thought he was

the sole cause of Ward and his daughter, who is my niece, being captured by the Indians."

"You were mistaken. He came here and went out with a party from the fort, several days ago, for the purpose of *rescuing* Miss Ward from the Indians."

"Then I acknowledge my mistake," said Wilkins.

"You have heard of the death of your niece and the trapper Long-shot?"

Wilkins deemed it best to pretend ignorance of the affair.

"How did you hear it?" he inquired, seeming horror-struck. "Great God! is it possible?"

"This negress told us!"

"This is terrible news to me!" cried Wilkins, applying his handkerchief to his eye.

Soon after he was told that he was free to pursue his journey.

He went on his way rejoicing.

"Not so bad, after all!" he muttered, rubbing his hands, "although I am sorry I did not get my money from that negress. It is evident she lost it, and with it the papers, which were all in the black bag she spoke of. She says she lost it in the swamp. I know exactly where that swamp is, and on my way, there is nothing to prevent my looking for the bag."

He urged his horse forward at a brisk trot, and before sundown arrived near the borders of the swamp.

In vain he searched for the bag. The swamp was extensive, and he did not know in what spot to look for it.

"This is bad!" he exclaimed—"very bad!"

Then a flash of joy crossed his face, as he thought of the New Orleans property.

"That will, at least, make up many times for my loss!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "I am at last on the high road to fortune—my enemies are removed from my path, and—"

He drew back with a sudden cry, as two forms advanced from the shrubbery.

"WILKINS!"

"CRUEL UNCLE!"

They who spoke were Mary Ward and Long-shot, upon whom Wilkins stared, open-mouthed and wild-eyed, as if he saw a couple of ghosts.

Soon, however, he was convinced that they were real flesh and blood, standing before him alive and well.

While he still stood rooted to the spot with astonishment, gazing upon them, there was a rustling in the shrubbery, and the detail which had been sent from the fort appeared, with Captain Freeman at its head.

"What is the meaning of this?" gasped Wilkins. "I thought you two were dead."

"You look disappointed," said Long-shot, bitterly. "Know that your horrible scheming against Ward's life and ours has been revealed to us by Sarah, your negro servant."

"Who will believe her? She stole money from my house. She is a thief!"

A peculiar smile was now seen upon the face of Captain Freeman.

"Wilkins," said he, "I once stopped belated at your house, and you treated me well. After that you called upon me at the fort, and I was glad to see you, believing you to be an honest man. I now have had cause to change my

opinion, and you must go with me to the fort—my prisoner!”

“Why, I have just been released from there!”

“I know nothing about that. You must go with me.”

“You are at the bottom of all this!” cried Wilkins, directing a look of hate at Long-shot.

“Perhaps you are sorry I am not dead. But I can soon explain that mystery. It is true that I fell upon my back when the Indians fired what they supposed was a fatal volley, and that Mary fell, too. It was, however, in accordance with my directions. The whole affair was a stratagem of mine to deceive my enemies and compel them to withdraw. Not one of their bullets touched us, and when daylight came, the swamp being dry, we made off for the woods. Here we were compelled to maneuver for several days, as there were Indians all around us, when, providentially, we fell in with Captain Freeman’s detail from the fort.”

“Now I want to know why I am arrested!” cried Wilkins. “Can you believe the word of a negress against mine?”

“It is not that alone,” answered Captain Freeman. “You will find out in time.”

In due season they arrived at the fort, when Wilkins was at once thrust into the guard-house.

An hour later he learned why he had been arrested.

Captain Freeman appeared, holding before him the FATAL NOTE WHICH HE HAD MISSED FROM HIS WALLET!

“My God! How came you by that?”

“Long-shot found a black bag in the swamp, when, as he told you, he crossed it with the girl at daylight. He found, besides this letter in the bag, a considerable sum of money.”

“Ha!” gasped Wilkins. “The BAG—the BLACK BAG!”

He now knew why he could not find it when he reached the swamp.

“LOST—LOST! everything LOST!” moaned the wretched man.

Long-shot and Mary Ward, who had remained outside a moment, now entered, conducted by the officer of the guard.

“Uncle,” said Mary, “I am very sorry for you, although you have been so very wicked.”

“Away from my sight!” screamed the wretched man—“away! I do not wish to be taunted by you now! Your face resembles too much that of your murdered father!”

“YES. THAR ARE SOME RESEMBLANCE!” cried a deep voice without—and then, into the guard-house stalked the tall, unmistakable figure of BENJAMIN WARD, with his long rifle slung over his shoulder!

At sight of him, Wilkins’s hair fairly stood on end, while his eyes bulged like marbles.

“I’m Ward—flesh and blood; so you needn’t star’ so. The b’ar-like hug I give Mary, when she come to the fort, showed her that I war no ghost, at once. I’ve been dodgin’ about, tryin’ to escape Injuns, for several days, lookin’ in vain fur my darter. At last—this mornin’—I arrived at this fort, whar, of all places, I least expected to meet my gal, who, as you see, came ten hours arterward, with that Long-shot, who hev proved himself so worthy of her, that I’ve overlooked

the grudge I had ag’in’ the lad, and in accordance with Mary’s pleadin’ consented to let him hev her.”

“Oh, papa!” exclaimed Mary, blushing deeply.

“I—I—thought you were scalped!” gasped Wilkins.

“To my sartin knowlledge, my ha’r is all right!” said Lynx-eye, with a grim smile, feeling of his hair.

“On our march,” said Captain Freeman, “we found a dead body, with the scalp taken off, which we were informed, by our little guide here”—pointing to Gnarl, who had hitherto kept in the background, but who now entered with head erect and a stately step—“he informed us that it was another person—a man from whom he had procured the horse with which he rode to the fort.”

“Ah! I see!” cried Wilkins—“it was Ben Jookes, and the mistake was all caused by his hair being exactly like Ward’s. The Indian who scalped him had probably never seen Ward, but having heard him described as having red hair, had mistaken Jookes for him.”

“A lucky mistake!” cried Gnarl, solemnly—“very lucky, and brought about, probably, by Him who watches over all,” pointing his finger skyward.

Misfortunes never come singly, and it would seem that Wilkins was destined to be overwhelmed by them, for he was now informed by the officer of the guard of the burning of his house, and the death of Mark Wylde, who had perished in the flames—news of the affair having reached the fort that day.

There is little more to add. Wilkins was shot a week later—executed in the fort.

Several months after, Mary Ward and Kit Swift were married in New Orleans, where they had safely arrived in a Mississippi boat, with Ward, a few weeks previously. The latter had come into possession of all his property, more valuable even than he had supposed.

He settled down, and lived to see several grandchildren; then died.

Soon after, Mary Ward sold out, and with her husband removed to the North—to New York, to purchase a beautiful estate on the Hudson, where she now resides, blessed with her kind husband and merry children.

With her to cheer him, Kit Swift may never long to return again to the wild prairie life he had followed so many years.

Gnarl, after occupying for several years the place of steward—the same position he had held with him who had bequeathed Ward his property—died, and was buried beneath the root of an old oak, near which Mary and her husband often linger, when they talk of the days gone by, and speak of their trusty little friend!

THE END.

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